

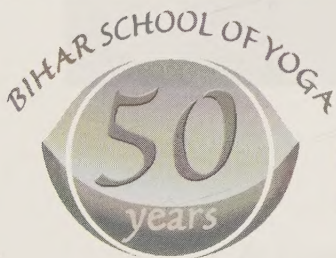
A Systematic Course in the Ancient Tantric Techniques of Yoga and Kriya

Swami Satyananda Saraswati



Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

Yoga and Kriya

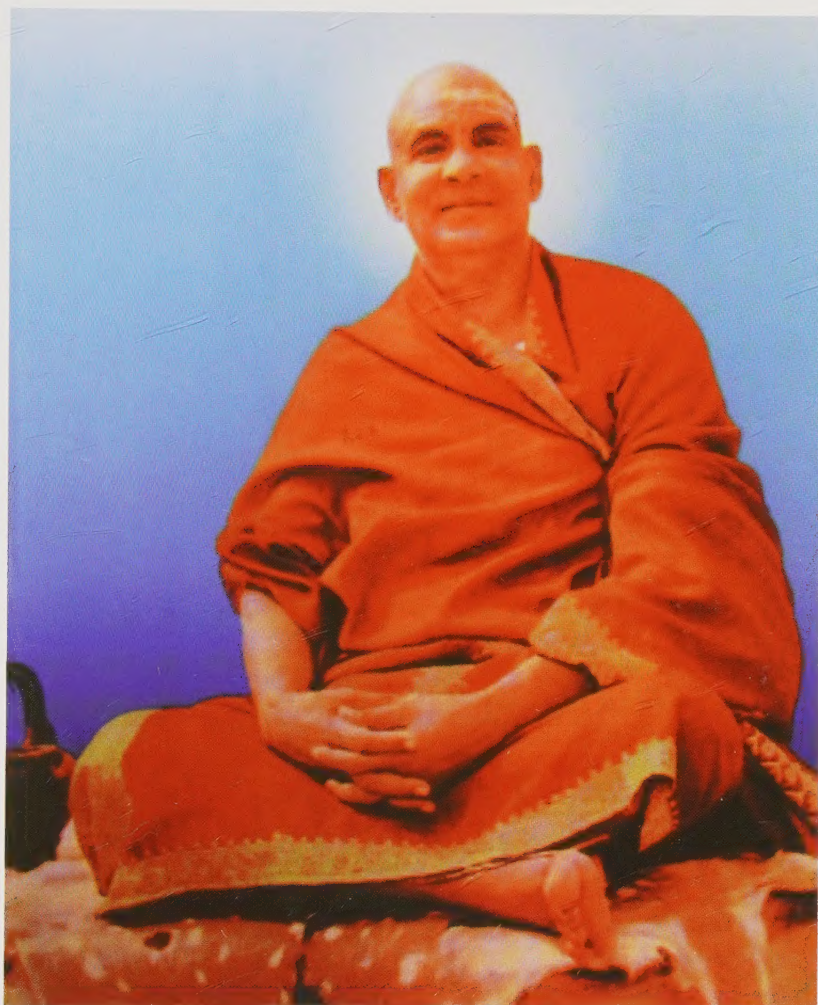


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Dedication

*In humility we offer this dedication to
Swami Sivananda Saraswati, who initiated
Swami Satyananda Saraswati into the secrets of yoga.*



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Swami Satyananda Saraswati



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Introduction

This book and the depth of knowledge it contains provides the link between you, the practitioner of yoga, and an experienced guide and teacher. This link is your *sadhana* (spiritual practice), the beginning of your inner transformation, spiritual awakening and realization of higher ideals in life.

The techniques covered in this book have their basis in the ancient Vedic (tantric and yogic) shastras and were handed down over the centuries from guru to disciple until they reached the late great Swami Sivananda Saraswati of Rishikesh, who further passed them on to his disciple, Swami Satyananda Saraswati. Now in an age when travel and communication have become almost instantaneous affairs and there are more efficient methods of disseminating wisdom than the human voice and ear, we wish to offer these transcendental instruments of grace to all who have eyes to read and ears to hear.

The original text was compiled from teachings given by Swami Satyananda to his closest disciples for the ultimate benefit of mankind. According to tradition many of the practices of yoga, especially the advanced practices of kriya yoga, were kept secret and passed on by word of mouth only between guru and disciple. However, modern man in his intense search for an underlying meaning in life has now come to a point of evolution where he is ready to integrate the practices of yoga both physically and spiritually. There is more guidance available also to help him understand and practise the more advanced techniques.

This book is our effort to keep this valuable tradition alive and to spread the message of yoga further into your homes and into your inner being. It is a complete work on yoga – a complete course in the practices of integral yoga. It presents a synthesis of the various paths of yoga in a scientific and systematic manner to ensure the harmonious development and unfoldment of every aspect of the

individual. The different branches – hatha yoga, raja yoga, mantra yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga and kriya yoga – are progressively introduced with special emphasis on practice and application in day to day life. Through the practice of integral yoga this book aims to develop in the aspirant a state of perfect body health, peace of mind and mental stability, perfect intellectual clarity and higher spiritual knowledge and awareness, a state where one is both useful to himself and to mankind. It contains the essence of Swami Satyananda's teachings and in this respect is an ideal single source of information for both teachers and students alike.

We have tried to present the book in such a way as to lead one gradually and progressively through the practices as if learning directly from a devoted teacher. If your approach is sincere and you follow your program regularly, the benefits will unfold themselves into all the different aspects of your life.

There are three main parts, divided into thirty-six lessons, containing various topics on both the theoretical and practical aspects of yoga, and eventually a full exposition of the ancient system of kriya yoga. The first book of practices for beginners is intended to systematically prepare the mind and body for the more advanced practices in Book II and eventually to the higher practices of kriya yoga in Book III. The ultimate aim is to progressively lead you step by step through the different techniques so that by the end of this *sadhana* course you will have an integrated approach and a full theoretical understanding of kriya yoga, as well as many other facets of yoga.

We are not interested in formulating a perfect philosophical system which bears no practical significance or relationship with daily life. In the form of discussions we have presented the theoretical side of the different paths of yoga to act as a guideline and inspiration to help you

to change and improve your life at all levels. These discussions are intended to open your eyes to certain aspects that perhaps you were blind to before in this most incredible world around us, above us and beyond us. Words at best only serve as a guide; they can never give the experience by themselves. The means are the practical techniques of yoga, using words as a method of communication.

The integration of both the theory and practice of yoga is the means of developing a new and simpler outlook on life and its seemingly complex patterns, i.e. a new consciousness. Each person is a unit consisting of body, mind and consciousness. Most evolutionary systems tackle one of these aspects and ignore or deny the other aspects. It is with this in mind that this book, an integral approach to yoga and life in general, is presented to you – a sadhana from beginning to end, to enable you to travel the inner transcendental road towards union and harmony.

Reasons for practising yoga

Your reason for wanting to practise yoga or your reason for currently practising yoga is not important. The important thing is that you have overcome previous prejudices and postponements to try yoga for yourself. You have overcome the biggest obstacle.

Perhaps you are doing yoga to develop a healthy body or a beautiful body. There is nothing wrong with this motive and the practices of yoga will help you to attain this. All we say to you is: "Be aware of your mind. Do you feel more peaceful? Have you developed greater concentration?" If so, then through personal experience you will know that yoga practices have a beneficial influence on the mind as well as the body.

Perhaps you have some illness or body ailment which you want to eliminate and have come to yoga as a last resort. Whether it is physical or mental, it does not matter, for yoga can help you. If it is mental peace you want or improved concentration or willpower, then definitely yoga can help, as the very essence of yoga is tied up with these faculties.

Many people have unsatisfactory relationships with wife or husband, friends or colleagues. The practice of yoga will help to put your relationship on a sure, positive basis. Remember, a relationship improves in depth

of understanding according to the level of self-awareness. Yoga aims at enabling you to know yourself and to see your foibles and nature in others. In this way, understanding arises and through this your personal relationships will improve.

Perhaps you have heard that yoga can improve or rectify sexual relationships. Yes, this is true and is a perfectly good reason for starting yoga, especially since inadequate sexual relations are often the cause of much unhappiness and frustration. A body that is perfectly healthy and efficient and a mind that is tuned to a high point of sensitivity and calmness, as they are through yoga practices, increase one's ability to enjoy sexual union or remove the obstacles that at present make it impossible.

Maybe you have religious beliefs, but without any spiritual experience. Or maybe you have no religious beliefs and you seek spiritual experience. Or perhaps you have no belief in the existence of spiritual experience, but have come to yoga merely to see what it is all about. It does not matter – you have come. That is the main thing.

What we are trying to say is that whatever your situation in life, whatever you believe or do not believe, whatever you want from life, yoga will help you because it changes your whole being and hence your relationship with and attitude to life itself.

The ultimate point of yoga and this book, however, is to expand your consciousness, to open your eyes to the vast number of things around you, of which at present you are unaware. It was Shakespeare who said: "There are more things in heaven and earth . . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy." We must keep our minds open to new possibilities. It is yoga that shows us a way.

The importance of practice

One can read or speak a million words and still find no change in one's consciousness. This is the mistake that verbose philosophers have been making throughout the ages. Although it is possible to devour great amounts of knowledge, this is not connected in any way with expanded awareness. It is merely mental accumulation of factual data. Our aim is to encourage you to become a suitable vessel to receive the influx of higher consciousness. Sri

Aurobindo put this idea very tersely with the following comment: "The cup has to be left clean and empty for the divine liquor to be poured into it."

The emphasis will be on your personal practice and effort. Without this, you will never develop sensitivity and awareness to your external and internal surroundings. We will start with the assumption that you know little or nothing about yoga practices. Gradually lesson by lesson the practices will be introduced and developed in step, we hope, with your personal practice and experience. It is absolutely essential to start from the basic practices and slowly but surely proceed to more advanced techniques. Failure to do this can lead to disappointment and disillusionment. For example, many people hear of meditation and try some practices for themselves without sufficient preparation. They sit comfortably, close their eyes and wait for something to happen. Because their eyes are closed they think they are introverted, but actually they are still thinking of the outside world or mulling over their problems. Their minds and consciousness are still in the same rut as they are every day. They achieve a little relaxation (though frustration is more likely) and then fall asleep. Nothing is gained and they begin to think that meditation is nothing more than a hoax. The preparation was not there so they failed to gain anything. Yoga is like any other science or art: preparation and training are essential.

Our objective is your regular and intense practice of the techniques as we introduce and explain them, in lessons progressing from the simple to the more difficult, so that you will eventually be able to do practices that at present seem completely impossible. Each lesson contains a number of topics systematically arranged according to the order of practices in your daily program. These topics include *general discussions* intended to develop your understanding of integral yoga side by side with your physical and mental transformation. Various *cleansing techniques* are included which aim at progressively purifying your body to help it meet the demands of the more subtle practices of *kriya yoga*. Topics on *asanas* will help strengthen your body, make it more flexible and give you more control over bodily functions, resulting in vibrant good

health. Different *pranayama* techniques are included to develop your breathing capacity, which leads not only to better health, but to an increased clarity and calmness of mind. *Meditation* practices aim at developing your ability to explore the mind and root out any subconscious problems. Then finally we will lead you to the techniques of *kriya yoga*. Our aim is to give you personal experience of what people have tried to talk about in the abundance of literature that exists today – experience of higher vibratory planes of existence.

There are many books available dealing with specific aspects of yoga such as *raja yoga*, *kundalini yoga* or *pranayama*. The techniques presented here can be learnt from varied sources and in different forms. In this work we have tried to arrange the practices in a certain ordered sequence so that they reinforce each other and lead the practitioner to both physical and spiritual development. Practice programs have been included at the end of each lesson with the purpose of bringing together all the different techniques into a form which can easily be fitted into your daily routine. There are integrated shorter and longer programs which can be adapted to the needs of both householders and *sadhakas*: for the mother, the working father, students, retired people and yoga teachers. However, to enhance the benefits obtainable from the practices and discussions in this book, we strongly recommend that you make contact with a swami, an ashram or an experienced yoga teacher for personal guidance. This applies especially to beginners.

Whatever you regard as meaningful in your life is your own business. We do not presume to want to change your beliefs through any type of dogmatic preaching. We are only interested in helping you to gain maximum happiness and fulfilment in life. To attain this there are various systems. The aim of this book is to guide you along your own path using yoga. We are not concerned with the path you tread, only that you tread it as effectively as you can.

Outline of the course

The following skeleton list gives an idea of the practices which will be covered. Obviously it cannot include everything contained in the book, as this would take up too much space.

Body cleansing: various systems for purifying the body; these will include practices such as neti, basti, kunjal, dhauti and shankhaprakshalana, plus such techniques as amaroli, diet and other natural healing methods.

Asanas: large numbers of asanas are included from pawanmuktasana, pre-meditation, meditation, forward bending, backward bending, spinal twist, relaxation, balancing, inverted, dynamic and advanced groups. Full information will be given on the limitations, benefits, counterposes and background of each practice.

Pranayama: all the important forms will be fully described, including nadi shodhana, bhastrika, kapalbhati, ujjayi, etc., as well as other aspects of prana control.

Mudras and bandhas: there are a hundred mudras. We will concern ourselves only with those most useful and which relate to kriya yoga. Among others shambhavi, khechari, vajroli, yoga, maha, naumukhi and hand mudras will be covered as well as the different aspects of all the bandhas.

Meditation practices: we intend to work through the most practical meditation practices and systematically introduce them so that you can simultaneously practise them for yourself. The practices will include ajapa japa, nada yoga, antar mouna, simple and complex mantra japa, trataka, yoga nidra, kriya yoga and more.

Book I

Preparation

Lesson 1

Yoga is not an ancient myth buried in oblivion.
It is the most valuable inheritance of the present.
It is the essential need of today and the culture
of tomorrow.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Kriya Yoga: An Introduction

All of us have potential which is beyond even our wildest dreams, but most of this potential remains untapped. Each person has the capacity to experience different planes of consciousness, yet most of us live in the lower planes, without experiencing higher levels of existence, or even believing that they exist.

Many people are unhappy in the world, dissatisfied and yet not sure what is lacking in their lives. The basic reason for this unhappiness is our attachment to the material plane of existence. Once we gain a glimpse of higher spheres of consciousness, then our unhappiness and discontent automatically fade away.

There are various systems of yoga, such as raja yoga, kundalini yoga, etc., which are widely propagated throughout the world. All are aiming at transcendental states where one starts to commune with one's inner being. Most of the systems emphasize the importance of concentration as a means of withdrawing consciousness from the outside surroundings and directing it into the innermost realms of the mind.

Without becoming too involved in the field of semantics, let us first of all define what is commonly understood by concentration. Concentration implies the focussing of one's consciousness towards one point, either external or internal, to the exclusion of all other subjects or thoughts. Now this is not such an easy process, for our consciousness in connection with our minds is habituated to movement from one point to the next, from one object to another. Any attempt on our part to subjugate the consciousness and make it dwell on one point imposes strain on the mind resulting in tension and frustration at our failure to curb its wandering tendency.

If you observe yourself you will find that your consciousness has a natural tendency to have a diverse perception and to move from one object to the next. Try to concentrate on one thing for a few minutes and you will

convince yourself of this fact. You will be conscious of a never-ending stream of thoughts, some that seem related to each other and others that seem totally unconnected. This occurrence of unconnected thoughts is known as distraction (*vikshepa*) and is a limitation of the mind.

Many systems of yoga tell you to place an object in front of you or to visualize an internal image, concentrate on it, and lo and behold you will start to explore the subconscious depths of the mind. Although the method is correct and can bring wonderful experiences, it takes no consideration of the wandering tendency of our consciousness, which makes concentration impossible for most people. Concentration is possible only if a person is very relaxed mentally and physically. Most people cannot relax, or if they do it is on rare occasions. For this reason the mind continually projects streams of differing thoughts to conscious perception. As such, to ask most people to concentrate is impossible. And if they try to concentrate, they will tend to try to suppress the disturbing factors in the mind and create more tension in themselves.

Concentration is something that occurs spontaneously in a very relaxed mind and body. Until relaxation is achieved, concentration, real concentration that is, remains impossible. A system is required which progressively leads a person to deeper states of relaxation, until concentration becomes the spontaneous activity of consciousness. This system is the system of kriya yoga.

Before we talk about kriya yoga, let us briefly discuss where concentration, relaxed concentration that is, will lead us. The fruit or culmination of deep one-pointed concentration is the occurrence of the spontaneous state of meditation. Most people have heard of meditation, yet very few people have actually experienced it. It arises only under conditions of almost abnormal relaxation (yes, abnormal

is the right word, for most people never experience deep states of relaxation; even during sleep they are plagued by subconscious worries, phobias, fears, etc.) of both mind and body, together with a high state of conscious alertness. Many people think that they are meditating, but in fact they are probably not. Modern scientific instruments can even show whether a person is in a state of meditation or not. These instruments measure electrical wave patterns emitted from the brain. The frequency and amplitude of these brain waves indicate the inner state of mind.

During concentration there is a continuity of consciousness and this condition allows our subconscious forces to rise up. The hidden psychological patterns in the subconscious mind start to manifest. Normally, because of our mental distractions, we are totally unable to contact or express our inner power. During deep periods of concentration we start to understand the deeper aspects of our being.

So the fruits of concentration are substantial. Many people, whether they have experienced meditation or not, know that great things are in store for them if only they can concentrate deeply. Because they are not relaxed, however, they force their consciousness to dwell on one point. Of course they are only following the instructions of most systems of yoga or yoga teachers. They don't realize that the systems of yoga are correct, but that they presuppose a reasonable level of relaxation, something that is not attained by most people today. The result of this forced concentration is greater tension and frustration. Meditation eludes them. To repeat: it is not the method that is wrong; its failure to bring results in most cases is due to the fact that people are not ready for the system. Most people have too many disturbances in their minds to be able to concentrate. Once the deep-rooted complexes have been removed, the ones that most of us are not aware of, then relaxation becomes possible; it becomes natural and deep. Meditation starts to occur spontaneously. No effort is required.

Questions arise such as "How can most people learn to explore their minds?" "If they cannot concentrate what should they do?" "How can one attain meditation experience?" This is where *kriya* yoga comes to the rescue. *Kriya* yoga seems to defy or contradict the basic

rules of yoga. It says that you should not try to concentrate your mind. Don't make any effort to bring about one-pointedness. Leave your consciousness freedom of movement, but let it try to follow prescribed internal movements. *Kriya* yoga accepts most people's limitations; if you are unable to concentrate then another method must be used to accomplish the same final result.

Kriya yoga is more interested in awareness than concentration. What do we mean by awareness? By awareness we mean conscious attention of thoughts or of objects, either external or internal, without necessarily being one-pointed. Simultaneously, and this is most important, the word awareness implies that the individual knows that his attention is at a particular place or on a train of thought. The word implies a relationship between the activity of perception and the perceiver. If a person does not know he is perceiving something, then he is not aware. Awareness implies that the individual does not try to suppress an ever-arising stream of thoughts, even if they have nothing to do with his direction of perception; he merely lets the thoughts arise and disappear, remaining as a witness to them. Other people might understand something different by the word awareness, but the previous explanation is what we mean. When a person is sufficiently relaxed, especially in the deeper layers of the subconscious mind, then awareness will lead to one-pointedness or concentration.

Kriya yoga does not presuppose concentration or even withdrawal of your awareness from the outside surroundings. As such, it is more suitable for most people today, since they are habituated to extroversion and to an awareness which tends to move here and there, and not dwell on one point to the exclusion of others. If you cannot concentrate and your conscious perception jumps here and there, it doesn't matter – just carry on your *kriya* yoga practices without becoming worried or frustrated. *Kriya* yoga doesn't ask you to withdraw your mind to one point; it asks you to do just the opposite – to actually move your awareness, to rotate your consciousness from one point to another.

The very word *kriya* means activity or movement, and in this context activity or movement of awareness or consciousness. The word *kriya*

also means practical or preliminary and in this sense it means the preliminary practice which leads to yoga; yoga here meaning the culmination, the union, the final result of practice, not the process as we normally understand it. Thus as we have already explained, in contrast to other forms of yoga, kriya yoga does not ask you to curb your mental fluctuations, but asks you to purposely create activity in your consciousness. In this way, mental faculties are harmonized and flower into their fullest potential, and coordination is brought about between the nervous system and the brain.

The source of the practices of kriya yoga goes back into antiquity and slowly evolved over a period of time through practice and experience. Eventually the practices, or kriyas, were written down and can still be found in the numerous tantric texts. These were written in Sanskrit, and to date only a few have been translated into other languages. The full form of kriya yoga consists of a combination of over seventy kriyas. Out of these kriyas, about twenty or so are commonly known.

Kriya yoga has been taught to large numbers of people throughout the world. Many people have gained wonderful benefits, yet others have gained little or nothing even though they might have practised regularly and with enthusiasm. The fault generally lies in the sequence of the practices. If the sequence is wrong, then the system of kriya yoga loses its full power, for the different kriyas bear a close relationship to each other. As an analogy, consider music. There are a certain number of musical notes. If these notes are played in a certain order, then beautiful music can result. If they are played in another sequence, then ear-jarring noise can result. The sequence is of the utmost importance. It is the same with the kriya yoga practices.

Another important requirement of successful practice of kriya yoga is the correct preparation. Again, many people learn kriya yoga as their first introduction to yoga practices in general, and so gain little or no benefit because their bodies and minds are not ready and they lack the ability to perform basic yogic techniques. A full preparation is essential and includes the following:

1. *Body control and sound health.* This is a basic aim and is achieved through hatha yoga. By body control we do not mean the type of

control that people in circuses have developed, but sufficient to perform yogic practices, including kriya yoga, with ease. Health, needless to say, is of utmost importance, not only for more advanced kriya yoga practices but for everyday life. If you have some disease or pain it is very difficult to think of anything else, let alone try to practise kriya yoga or any other higher form of yoga practice. For this reason, the initial aim of yoga should be to make you radiate health by removing existing ailments or by improving your present condition of health. It is by doing asanas, pranayama and various body cleansing techniques, as outlined in Book I and II, that we can attain this required state of vitality.

Once we have attained sufficient body control and health, then the practices of kriya yoga become very easy, for your awareness can follow the kriya yoga techniques without being continually disturbed by body discomfort or illness. We can actually forget the body and direct our awareness in other directions.

2. *Proficiency in mudras and bandhas.* These will be fully discussed in forthcoming lessons. However, as a brief description, we can say that both mudras and bandhas are methods of stimulating nerve plexuses and endocrinal secretions and for activating bio-energies in the body. Mudras are also sometimes intended as symbolic expressions of inner mental or psychic feelings. This is a very basic description.

3. *Development of breath consciousness.* What is breath consciousness? It is very easy and can be developed by anyone with practice. It is merely being aware of the fact that: "I am breathing in and I am breathing out". This can be done even while you are talking, or working, or when the mind is engaged in other directions, as well as when you are sitting comfortably with your eyes closed. It can be done at any time and under any circumstances, even while you are reading these words and simultaneously understanding everything that is written. With practice it is possible to undertake all your daily activities and still maintain this breath awareness.

Awareness of your breath implies that you are simultaneously aware of your consciousness. In other words, if you are aware that you are breathing then you are automatically aware of your own awareness. Most people forget the fact that they are aware or conscious; they

are so wrapped up in their thought processes and actions that they do these things automatically. So by being aware of your breath you continually know that you are aware of your conscious being; you no longer lose yourself in mental and physical activity. This is a very important point to remember.

As a slight digression, consider the difference between an animal and a human being. An animal eats food, sleeps and performs various other activities during the course of its life. A human being also eats food, sleeps, etc. but has one distinctive feature: the capacity to know that he is acting, whereas an animal performs various actions without knowing it. There is also a distinct difference between various stages of human development. All humans think, yet some who are more aware are able to watch themselves thinking. They are able to stand outside themselves and watch the thinking process occurring within their mind. This is the aim of breath awareness: to continually remind you of your ability to be aware of your consciousness and to be a witness or a spectator of your mental and physical activities. Breath awareness is an essential part of kriya yoga.

4. *Location and familiarity with the psychic passages and chakras.* A psychic passage is a pathway or channel in which your breath awareness, or psychic consciousness can flow or move. There are various different pathways, one of which is in the centre of the spinal column, from top to bottom. It is easy to describe the route of the psychic pathway, but the practitioner must develop and experience the flow of breath consciousness in the psychic pathway for himself. One must be aware of the breath and feel the movement of breath in the passage.

There is a good reason why this rotation or movement of consciousness is an integral part of kriya yoga. These psychic passages pass through various nerve plexuses in the body, particularly those pertaining to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. The mere fact that you are aware of these places has a stimulating influence which awakens nerve impulses, which bring about psychological and biochemical changes in the body. This can be experienced even after a short period of practice in the form of calmness, tranquillity and clarity of thought.

The reason for this result is that these plexuses are connected directly to brain centres and to endocrinal glands. Of particular significance are the two parasympathetic nerve outflows in the region of the base of the spine and the top of the spine. The parasympathetic nervous system tends to reduce nervous tension, in opposition to the sympathetic nervous system, which tries to produce tension and the readiness of the mind and body to withstand external events. Awareness of the lower and upper parts of the spine or the spinal psychic passages is an important part of kriya yoga. This brings about relaxation of the body and mind by stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system. Additionally there are many other factors involved, however they will be explained later.

Kriya yoga has been traditionally associated with secrecy, since its methods were always passed on from guru to disciple by word of mouth. Because of this system of teaching, many myths have arisen. People have come to the conclusion that kriya yoga is a secret system, meant only for the few. Some people have begun to believe that one must possess many special qualifications to learn and practise kriya yoga and that one must be a celibate with strict abstention from sexual life. All these ideas are totally wrong. Kriya yoga can be practised by all people without exception. Why should it be limited to a few chosen persons? We do, however, emphasize that adequate preparation is essential for positive results; but in this sense it is no different from anything else that you learn or study in life. If you want to perfect any skill, whether it is mechanical, medical or whatever, you have to start from basic principles and techniques.

Kriya yoga does not ask you to abstain from your sexual life. Why should it? Sexual activity is a natural part of life, so why abstain from it? Kriya originated from the ancient system of tantra, and of all the spiritual systems tantra is the most understanding regarding sexual life. In fact, under correct circumstances tantra has encouraged the use of sex as a means to evolve spiritually. Of course there is much written about the conservation of sexual energy and its sublimation into spiritual power. This idea has been sadly misunderstood. When people write about sublimating sexual energy and directing it into higher channels they generally miss the

whole point. The transformation of seminal fluid into *ojas* or spiritual power is often mentioned but again misunderstood. Actually it is the transformation of sexual thoughts into spiritual directions that is implied here. Many people waste enormous amounts of mental power and energy continually dwelling on sexual fantasies and so on. If this same energy could be channelled into spiritual pursuits, then many fruits could be gained. It is not necessary to abstain from sexual relations. Continue your sexual relations, but don't dwell continually on sexual thoughts. Direct your mind in other directions, not necessarily spiritual; towards work, study or whatever you are interested in. In this way you will find new dimensions of power in your thinking and physical activities. This is the meaning of sublimation of sexual energy. The practice of kriya yoga definitely does not ask you to change your way of life.

From the experience of teaching different techniques of yoga, we have noticed a distinct and remarkable difference between people's reaction to kriya yoga and other systems that require concentrated effort. When people try to concentrate they tend to become more tense and develop headaches, the opposite, of course, to what is intended. After a short time they become frustrated, start to lose interest in the practices and start to scratch, fidget and generally feel uncomfortable. They start to open their eyes and their awareness begins to wander more than it did before the start of the practices. There seems to be a reaction to this concentration and their mind rebels and does exactly the opposite to what is intended. With kriya yoga, however, there is a noticeable difference. Because they are not asked to concentrate deeply, only to do their practices, the awareness seems to spontaneously become one-pointed and relaxed. The mind is like a naughty child. If you tell it to do one thing it will do exactly the opposite. So by asking it to concentrate, it wanders. In kriya yoga, by asking it to wander if it wishes, it seems to want to become one-pointed. From this state, meditation can spontaneously arise and your awareness can start to explore the vast layers of the subconscious and unconscious mind.

When you begin to understand and to know what lies in the deeper recesses of your mind, the vast mental reservoir about which you

are not normally aware, it is then that you can start to eradicate the phobias and fears, complexes and tensions which make your life unhappy. It is these subconscious, negative mental *samskaras* (impressions) which continually act below the surface of your normal consciousness and cause mental disturbances. Often you feel unhappy and depressed. Sometimes you may know, but generally you don't understand why you feel this way, only that you do. The cause lies with these fears, phobias, bad memories, etc. By becoming aware of them, by delving into the mind you automatically start to neutralize their negative influence on your life. If you don't know what the root cause of your unhappiness is, how can you rectify the situation? The more of these problems that you remove, the happier your life will become. This is also the way to cure emotional imbalances, nervous disorders and all the different types of psychological problems that plague people throughout the world. Other methods of making people's lives happier have been tried but there is only one sure way – relax your mind, know your mind and throw out the rubbish that exists there.

The first obstacle in yoga is relaxation of the mind while being fully aware. If you can attain a sufficient degree of mental relaxation, then automatically your awareness will start to introvert, to explore the mind. This will probably occur on the superficial levels at first, but eventually you will start to see your deeper problems in the form of symbolic visions. This is the stage at which you really begin to remove your deeper problems. If you relax the mind and then sleep, you will gain nothing because you will not be conscious of your mind and its contents. Your awareness is not there.

We have found that the ideal method for the man of today is kriya yoga. Without suppressing the wandering tendency of the awareness and thereby causing more tension in the mind than was there to begin with, kriya yoga aims at making your awareness spontaneously one-pointed. In this way, your awareness automatically introverts and so starts to reshape the activities of the mind to eventually bring about a state of equanimity or tranquillity. Kriya yoga allows you to filter out the morass, the quagmire of complexes, fears, etc. in your mind which make life an unhappy affair. No strain or mental effort is required to

remove these problems. You merely do your practices and in the course of time your mind will become clearer.

There are no restrictions or barriers to those who want to practise kriya yoga. Your age, diet, social position, religion or whatever, will not bar you from practising. All you need is the interest and effort to change your life.

It is our intention to make the system of kriya yoga available to everyone who is interested, because large numbers of people are now ready to reap the benefits of kriya yoga, yet cannot because they lack knowledge of the system. If you feel that kriya yoga is for you, then we hope that you will sincerely take up the practices systematically illumined in this book, and will start today to prepare yourself for the subtle science of kriya yoga.

Hatha Yoga: Jala Neti

Yogic science gives as much importance to certain cleansing processes as it does to asanas or pranayama. Without regular cleansing of the system you will not gain maximum benefits from your practices. Without purification of the body one will not be ready for the higher practices of yoga. When the body is free the mind also functions properly.

Body cleansing is gained through the practice of *shatkarmas* or the six purificatory techniques. They are very important from the point of view of physical and mental health, and these simple techniques are also highly valuable in healing internal disorders.

There are six main groups of shatkarmas or yogic cleansers as follows:

1. *Neti*: nasal cleansing, including jala neti and sutra neti.
2. *Dhauti*: cleansing of the digestive tract, including danta dhauti, vatsara dhauti and so forth.
3. *Nauli*: abdominal massage.
4. *Basti*: colon cleaning.
5. *Kapalbhati*: purification and vitalization of the frontal lobes.
6. *Trataka*: blinkless gazing.

Each of these groups contains more than one practice such as jala neti, vaman dhauti (or kunjla kriya), moola shodhana etc., which will be described at various stages throughout this book¹. They are all excellent practices which are designed to purify the whole body and bring about first class health. They also bring clarity and harmony to the mind. We suggest you try some of them.

The first technique we will give is jala neti.

JALA NETI

Jala neti is a process of cleaning the nasal passage with salt water, and is essential in allowing free breathing as required in many of the practices we will teach you, as well as in helping to ensure your good health.

The functions of the nose

The nose is the body's organ for ensuring that the air that enters the lungs is of sufficient purity and warmth not to cause harm. The air that we inhale is rarely suitable for entry into the lungs. It is generally too cold, too dirty and too germ-ridden. It is the function of the nose to rectify this situation.

First of all, the air we breathe contains dust and small insects. These larger impurities are initially screened out by the vibrating hairs at the entrance to the nasal passages. These hairs vibrate in the opposite direction to the air as it enters the nose and prevent impurities from proceeding further.

In the deeper regions of the nose there are special bony structures which are covered with a thick, spongy, germicidal mucus membrane, through which circulates a large, rich supply of blood. The mucus membrane follows a long winding air passage which ensures that all the inhaled air comes in contact with the membranes. These mucus membranes remove millions of germs that are contained in the air and which could cause the lungs much harm, and in fact do in the case of pulmonary tuberculosis, bronchitis, etc. This mucus membrane also removes small particles of dust that have passed through the first defence of the hairs. This membrane both heats and moistens the air to a level which will not harm the lungs. Cold and dry air can result in much injury to the lungs.

Deeper in the nose there are a set of glands which further help to eliminate germs that have managed to escape the previous defences. Additionally, our sense of smell prevents us inhaling noxious gases. As soon as we smell something unpleasant we immediately stop breathing, or if possible seek clean, fresh air.

By now the reader should be aware of the importance of the seemingly insignificant organ – the nose. It should also be obvious why it is so unhealthy to breathe continually

through the mouth as so many people do. When air is inhaled through the mouth instead of the nose, it escapes all the mechanisms of the nose which prepare the air for admittance to the lungs. All the dust, germs, cold and dry air directly enter the lungs. The mouth and throat do have mechanisms for removing these impurities and air conditions, but they are nowhere nearly as efficient as the nose.

If the nose is blocked, or if the mucus membranes are profusely covered in impurities, then the nose cannot perform its duties effectively. In fact if the nose is completely blocked, then one is forced to breathe through the mouth. And we have already explained the disadvantages of this process. This is the reason why we blow our noses: to remove these impurities and to allow the nose to operate efficiently. However, the normal nose blowing does not remove all impurities. Ingrained, dry mucus can remain. This is one of the reasons that the practice of *neti* was developed: to ensure the best possible cleaning of the nose.

There are other reasons for the use of *neti* such as the stimulation of various nerve endings in the nose; this leads to improvement in the brain and organs to which these nerves connect and also helps in the stimulation of *ajna chakra*, the midbrain psychic centre.

Equipment

A pot or *lota* (pitcher) should be used to introduce salt water into the nostrils. There are various designs and even a teapot can be used if nothing else is available. We recommend the shape of the pot to be as shown in the accompanying picture. This pot is known as a *neti lota*. It can be made of brass or any other suitable material which does not contaminate water, but the important thing to remember is that the nozzle on the end of the spout should be suitably sized so that the end fits comfortably into your nostril.

Salt water

The water used in the practice should be pure and lukewarm; body temperature is the ideal temperature for pouring the water into your nose. The water should then be mixed with clean salt in the proportion of one teaspoonful per half litre of water. Make sure the salt is fully dissolved in the water. People often wonder

why salt water is introduced into the nostrils instead of ordinary water. The reason is very simple and very practical. Salt water has a much higher osmotic pressure than ordinary water, which means that salt water is not easily absorbed into the delicate blood vessels and membranes in the nose, whereas ordinary water is. If you try this practice with ordinary water you will discover for yourself, in the form of discomfort or a little pain in the nose. However, we don't suggest you do this, though it is not at all dangerous.

In conclusion, salt water is ideal for *jala neti*, because while it thoroughly cleans the nostrils of impurities it is not absorbed into the delicate nasal membranes. As such no discomfort will be felt when the water flows through the nose.

Posture

One may either sit in a squatting position known as *kagasana*², or one may assume a standing position, bending the shoulders and head forwards. This position is most suitable for doing *neti* into a sink or wash basin, while the other position, *kagasana*, can be done in the garden or in a shower.



Technique

Fill the *neti* pot with the prepared salt water. Hold the bottom of the pot with one hand, as shown in the accompanying picture. Gently insert the end of the nozzle into the end of the left nostril (or, if this is blocked into the right nostril).

There should be no force involved, but the nozzle should press firmly against the side of the one nostril so that no water leakage occurs. Progressively tilt your head to the right side while simultaneously raising the *neti* pot in such a way that water runs into the left nostril. Make sure that you keep your mouth wide open so that you can breathe. Some people say that the mouth should be closed and the breath held during the practice, but we feel

this complicates, especially for beginners, a practice that is essentially very simple. If the pot is in the correct position, if your head is tilted at a suitable angle and if there is a tight fit between the nozzle and the sides of the nose, then the water should flow in through one nostril and out through the other nostril. It doesn't matter if water flows into your mouth or throat, but if the practice is performed correctly with relaxation this should not happen. Allow the water to flow through the nostrils for 10 to 20 seconds.

Then remove the neti pot and remove the water and impurities from your nose by closing the left nostril and breathing quickly and forcibly through the other nostril. Don't blow so hard, however, that you damage your nose and cause bleeding. In this respect the practitioner should use his/her discretion.

Now close the right nostril and blow forcibly through the left nostril.

Now pour water into the right nostril for about 20 seconds and repeat the same process.

Again pour water into each of the nostrils in turn, repeating the same technique just described.

Drying the nostrils: after completing this practice the nostrils must be dried and any further impurities removed.

Stand erect. Bend forwards so that the trunk assumes a horizontal position.

Close one nostril by pressing the side of the nose with the thumb. Breathe in and out vigorously up to 10 times in quick succession. The exhalation should be especially emphasized to expel the moisture from the nostrils. Repeat the same procedure with the other nostril closed. Then repeat the same procedure with both nostrils open.

This simple practice should remove most of the moisture from the nose. If moisture remains the vigorous breathing should be repeated until the nose is perfectly dry.

Duration

Once the practitioner is familiar with the technique, the whole practice can be completed in a short period of time. Not including preparation of the water, the whole process should take less than five minutes.

Neti is ideally practised early in the morning before breakfast. However, if necessary, it can be practised at other times of the day,

excepting straight after meals. Once a day is sufficient, though if one has nasal catarrh, a cold or any other specific ailment, it may be practised more times.

Limitations and precautions

People who suffer from chronic bleeding of the nose should not do neti without expert advice. Make sure that the water is not too hot when you introduce it into the nostrils. Do not breathe in and out too deeply when removing the moisture from the nose; we are trying to improve the condition of your nose, not damage it. Also, if the sinuses are blocked with mucus, be careful not to blow your nose hard. It is very easy to push the mucus further into the cavities. Ensure that the salt fully dissolves in the water before pouring it into your nose.

Be careful to hold the head correctly and not to hold the neti pot too low. In order for the water to flow into one nostril and out the other, the water level in the pot must be higher than the region at the back of the nose, where the two nostrils merge with each other. If you tilt your head too much then the water will go down your throat instead of the other nostril. If you tilt the pot too much the water will merely overflow out of the pot. You must adjust the position of your head and the pot so that they are at correct levels.

People who have great difficulty passing water through the nose may have a structural blockage such as a polyp. Expert advice should be sought. If there is a slight burning sensation in the nose during your first attempt with salt water, don't worry. This will disappear as your nose tissue becomes accustomed to contact with water.

Benefits

Neti is the best method of preventing and eliminating colds. An effective cure for the common cold has not yet been found. Neti is not foolproof, but it goes a long way to solving the problem. A cold indicates something significant, namely that your body is in a weakened condition. If this was not the case, the cold virus would be unable to penetrate the defences of your system; your autotherapeutic powers would be strong enough to withstand such an attack. The cold virus flourishes in nerve tissue, particularly the olfactory nerves in the nose. During a cold, neti greatly helps

by removing the accumulated mucus in the nose, this being a breeding ground.

Regular practice of neti when you don't have a cold keeps the nasal passages working at optimum efficiency and thereby helps to maintain a healthy body. Remember, breathing through the mouth or insufficient treatment of the inhaled air prior to entry into the lungs, due to nasal blockage and congestion, can encourage the onset of disease, by allowing germs to infect the lungs, or by generally weakening the state of health of the body.

Neti is also a help in curing sinusitis, ailments of the eyes, nose and throat, tonsillitis, catarrh, as well as inflammation of the adenoids and mucus membranes. It is effective in removing headaches, insomnia and tiredness. Neti has a subtle influence on the various nerves which end in the nasal passages, such as the olfactory bulb and other adjacent nerves which innervate the eyes, ears, etc. This has a very soothing influence on the brain and can help to relieve such ailments as migraine, epilepsy, depression, tension, etc.

Neti helps in no small manner to prevent and cure lung diseases such as asthma, pneumonia, bronchitis, pulmonary tuberculosis, etc., for the reasons already mentioned. Respiration becomes much easier, which leads to an improved intake of oxygen, improved removal of carbon dioxide and consequently better health.

Importance of neti in yogic physiology

The science of yoga maintains that the flow of air in each nostril alternately changes. If you test this for yourself, you will find this to be true. At present one of your nostrils is admitting more air than the other. After some time the other nostril will admit the greater amount of air.

This alternate flow of breath through the two nostrils in turn has a profound influence on the energy cycle of man. It controls our thinking and physical activity, our introversion and extroversion. This cycle has a great bearing on our mental and physical health.

Now if one or both of the nostrils are permanently blocked, then this natural alternation of breath flow cannot occur. Our health can suffer. This is another reason why jala neti is so important; it cleans both nostrils and allows the breath to alternate freely between the two.

Notes

¹ See the index of practices at the end of this book.

² See Topic 3 of this lesson.

Asanas: Pre-Meditative Exercises

Most people today are physically very stiff. You can test this for yourself: from a standing position, keep your legs straight and bending forwards try to touch your toes with your hands. If you can't (please do not force or strain), then this shows that your body is stiff. Because of this stiffness most people cannot sit in one position for a very long time, as is necessary in higher yogic practices, without feeling the urge to move their limbs in response to discomfort. The following simple exercises are designed to generally loosen up your body and prepare you for eventual mastery of meditation asanas. There are many possible loosening up exercises, far too many for daily practice. The following exercises are selected ones which we feel give optimum results, especially when performed systematically in the order that we have described them.

Preparations

1. Practise in a well ventilated, unobstructed room. Do not practise in a gale-force wind or draught.
2. Use a folded blanket or rug placed on the floor.
3. Wear comfortable clothing which doesn't obstruct free movement. Use common sense in this respect.
4. Please do not use unnecessary strain or force in any of the exercises. Though you may find that your muscles are a little stiff to begin with, they will begin to stretch even after a few days of regular practice.¹

GOOLF GHOORNAN (ANKLE CRANK)

The first of these pre-meditative asanas loosens up the ankle joints.

Technique

Sit on a blanket.

Stretch both legs out in front of the body.



Bend the right leg.

Hold the right ankle with the right hand.

Place the right foot on the left thigh, as near as possible to the groin.

Hold the right toes with the left hand.

Mentally say to yourself: "I am loosening up my ankle joints and with practice they will become loose."

Simultaneously rotate your ankle 10 times clockwise.

Try to relax your foot as much as possible, rotating your foot about the ankle with your left hand.

Repeat 10 times anticlockwise.

Repeat the whole process, 10 times clockwise and 10 anticlockwise, with the left foot folded on the right thigh.

ARDHA TITALI ASANA (HALF BUTTERFLY)

This exercise specifically loosens up the thigh, knee and ankle joints.

Technique

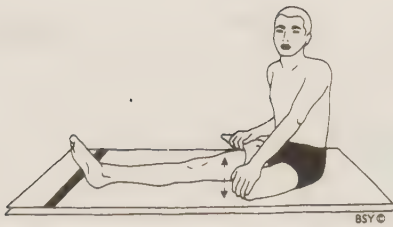
Remain sitting as in the previous exercise. Fold the left leg.

Place the left foot on the right thigh.

Place the left hand on the top of the bent left knee.

Relax your whole body, especially the folded leg.

Gently push the left knee up and down.



The bent leg should be as relaxed as possible, the movement being applied by the left arm. Simultaneously, mentally repeat to yourself: "I am loosening up my ankle, knee and hip joints and will eventually be able to touch the floor with my folded knee."

Move your knee up and down 50 times. After completing slowly straighten your bent leg, without jerking or twisting the knee.

Then bend your leg, bringing your heel to the buttocks and lastly straighten it again. This releases muscular tension.

Fold your right foot on to your left thigh.

Repeat the same process, moving your right knee up and down 50 times.

Note: With practice and the right mental approach everyone should eventually be able to touch the knees to the ground. We emphasize that you must adopt the correct mental attitude; in other words, if you expect to eventually touch the floor with your knees, then you will.

SHRONI CHAKRA (HIP ROTATION)

This exercise helps to strengthen the muscles and joints of the legs in preparation for meditation poses.



Technique

Fold the left foot on the right thigh as in the previous exercise. Hold the bent knee with the left hand. Rotate the knee clockwise 10 times. Simultaneously mentally repeat to yourself: "I

am loosening up my legs and will eventually be able to touch the floor with my knees."

Allow your bent leg to remain passive, using the force of the left arm to rotate the knee.

Repeat 10 times anticlockwise.

Now straighten your bent leg, without jerking or twisting the knee. Bend the leg once, bringing the right heel near the buttocks.

Then straighten the leg. This removes muscular tension and further loosens the joints.

Repeat the same procedure with the other leg folded.

Note: We emphasize the importance of the mental repetition while performing the exercises. The whole point of it is to loosen up the legs so that you can eventually touch the knees on the ground. If you don't have this goal in mind, the exercise is 75% less effective.

Some people may find the exercise easier if they hold the foot of the folded leg with the opposite hand while rotating the knee with the other arm.

UTTHANASANA (SQUAT AND RISE POSE)

This exercise strengthens and loosens the whole leg, specifically the knees. When it is perfected, one should be able to squat comfortably on the ground with both heels flat on the floor.



Technique

Stand erect with your feet about 1 metre apart. Interlock your fingers in front of your abdomen and allow your arms to hang freely. Slowly bend your knees and lower your trunk about 20 cms.

Return to the erect position.

Again descend, this time slightly lower.

Return to the erect position again.

Lower the body again.

Your hands should be 30 cms above the floor. Rise again.

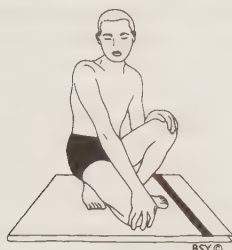
Lower to the final lowered position with hands

on the floor. Return to an erect position and relax.

Note: The final position, practised with hands on the knees, is known as kagasana, the crow pose.

KAUVA CHALASANA (CROW WALKING)

This again is an excellent exercise for loosening and strengthening the legs.

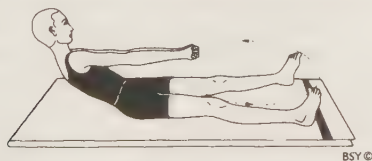


Technique

Assume kagasana. Make sure the palms are on your knees. Start slowly to walk in this position. You can either walk on tiptoe or keeping the feet flat on the floor. Spend half of your practice on tiptoe and the other half of your practice on the flats of your feet.

CHAKKI CHALANASANA (CHURNING THE MILL)

This is an excellent exercise for shoulders, lower back, lower abdomen and waist. It is a movement which many Indian ladies use when they grind corn between two grinding wheels.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs outstretched, feet apart.

Interlock your fingers.

Straighten your arms at shoulder height.

Rotate your hands in as big a circle as possible on a horizontal plane.

Keep your arms straight throughout the whole exercise.

Lean forward and try to make your interlocked hands pass over the top of the feet at the outer stroke of the circle.

Then try to lean backwards as far as possible, keeping your feet on the ground, so that your hands pass over the top of your thighs.

Rotate your hands 10 times clockwise, then 10 times anticlockwise.

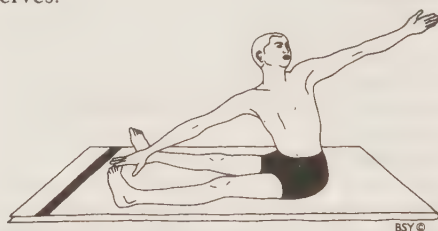
Lie back and relax yourself completely.

Breathing

Breathe in as you lean backwards. Breathe out as you lean forwards. When you can easily perform the physical movement alone, coordinate your breathing with the movement. When the practice has been mastered with the breathing added, then become aware of the movement of the muscles of the lower back as the exercise is performed.

GATYATMAK MERU WAKRASANA (DYNAMIC SPINAL TWIST)

This exercise gives the whole spine a good twist in both directions and thereby loosens up the vertebrae and tones important spinal nerves.



Technique

Remain in the same sitting position as the previous exercise.

Separate your legs as far apart as is comfortable.

Raise the arms on each side of the body to shoulder height, keeping them straight.

The arms should stay in a straight line throughout the exercise.

Lean forward and touch your left foot with your right hand.

In this position the left arm should point backwards, in exactly the opposite direction to the right arm. Both arms should form one straight line.

The head should be turned to gaze at the arm extended behind you.

Now twist your trunk in the opposite direction, touching the right foot with the left hand, the head turned in the opposite direction towards the right hand behind the back.

This is 1 round. Do 10 to 20 rounds.

As the body becomes more flexible the legs should be spread further apart. Keep the legs straight throughout the exercise.

Breathing

Exhale as you twist the body to either side and inhale as you centre your body.

GREEVA SANCHALANA (NECK MOVEMENTS)

All nerves connecting the different parts of the body must pass through the neck to reach the brain. The following movements tone up these vital nerves and generally loosen up the neck vertebrae. It is also an excellent method of reducing tension and inducing calmness of mind. It can also help relieve headaches caused by too much tension in the neck and shoulder regions.

Technique

Sit cross-legged.

Rest your hands on your lap.

Relax your whole body.

Let your shoulders drop; make sure they are not hunched.

Close your eyes.

Stage 1

With control, very slowly tilt the head forwards. Then slowly return the head to the upright position.

Slowly tilt the head backwards.

Then tilt the head forward again to a normal position.

This is 1 round.

The whole movement should be completed in 1 smooth motion.

Do 10 rounds.

Stage 2

Bend the head to each side, with the ear going towards the shoulder, in the same slow motion that was performed in the previous exercise.

Do 10 rounds.

We recommend that the time of rotation for 1 round be reduced to 15 seconds eventually.

Stage 3

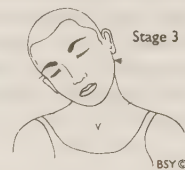
Slowly rotate your head clockwise in as large a circle as possible. Ensure that the shoulders remain as relaxed as possible throughout the practice.

Rotate 5 to 10 times.

Then repeat the same rotation in the anti-clockwise direction.

Throughout the practice watch the space in front of the closed eyes.

Try to imagine that your body is floating in this space and that your head is detached from your body. This will help to induce relaxation.



Notes

¹ For full details on the rules and preparation for asana practice refer to Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 3.

Pranayama: Breathing

Breathing is a process that we rarely give any thought to. It occurs automatically without our awareness, yet at the same time it is something that most people do incorrectly. If breathing is a spontaneous function of the body, how is it possible to do it incorrectly? The answer is that our respiratory muscles become lazy and cease to give optimum inhalation and exhalation.

Our whole life is entirely dependent on breathing. If we stop breathing then life itself ceases in the body. Life and breath are intimately connected. Remember, when a person dies we say that he expires, the same word used for breathing out, or for breath leaving the lungs. We can survive for a few days without drinking water, a few weeks without taking food, but how long can the average person survive without drawing air into the lungs? In most cases no more than a few minutes. It is written in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the ancient text on yoga: "Life is the period between one breath and the next; a person who only half breathes, only half lives. He who breathes correctly, acquires control of the whole being." The ancient yogis were fully aware of the importance of breath; no breath no life; breath is life.

In yoga it is said that each person has a fixed number of breaths allocated to him. If one breathes slowly then one will live longer, for the number of breaths is allocated for the lifetime; if one breathes rapidly the given number of breaths are used up more quickly resulting in a shorter life span. Whether you accept this idea or not, there is nevertheless a great deal of truth in it. A fast breathing rate is associated with tension, fear, worry, etc. which tends to lead to bad health, unhappiness and of course a shorter life. A person who breathes slowly is relaxed, calm and happy, which is conducive to longevity. A person who breathes quickly tends to inhale small volumes of air and exhale the same small volumes; this tends to allow

germs to accumulate in the lower areas of the lungs. Conversely, a person who breathes slowly tends to also breathe deeply and thereby fill the lungs to a greater depth. This helps to remove stagnant air from the lower reaches of the lungs and to destroy the breeding ground of germs and the germs themselves. There are other reasons that relate longevity to slow and deep breathing. For example, deep breathing imparts a good massage to the abdominal organs via the diaphragm. This is a natural and essential subsidiary function of the breathing process, which is often overlooked. The massage of the liver, stomach, etc. keeps them in good working order by expelling old, impure blood and allowing pure, oxygenated blood to replace it. Shallow breathing connected with fast breathing does not give the internal organs the massage they require. This can lead to various diseases. It, in itself, does not cause them, but tends to encourage the onset in conjunction with other body factors.

Shallow breathing also leads to insufficient oxygen in the body. This causes functional disturbances and illnesses concerned with circulatory, digestive and nervous systems, since the efficiency of these systems is entirely dependent on healthy, well-nourished nerves and organs, which depend completely on oxygen for survival.

These are a few examples of how insufficient breathing can have negative repercussions in our lives, yet most people in the world do not breathe properly. The modern way of life has put us out of touch with the natural life rhythm. Our lives, our body functions, our way of living are normally intended to be guided by rhythms in our internal and external surroundings. Our heartbeat and breathing rate harmonize with each other to give perfect cooperation under normal situations. Our lives are determined by the rhythms of the daily sunrise and sunset

together with the rhythm of the moon and stars in more subtle ways. Consider animals. Their whole life is, or seems to be determined by rhythms of nature. Birds migrate according to the seasons. Animals mate and sometimes change their fur or feathers in accordance with seasonal changes. Certain species of fish and eels travel thousands of miles at a certain time of the year to spawn in a particular locality. Science has not yet been able to tell us what causes this, but it seems more than likely that some rhythm of life stimulates or triggers a brain function which automatically makes them follow mixed patterns of behaviour.

What is it that causes thousands of ants to work in harmony with each other for the benefit of the ant community? There seems to be some rhythm in their actions which leads to an integrated whole. What this rhythm is no one knows, yet we can see it when we study the activities of ants, or bees, or termites, etc. Without this uniformity there would be complete chaos.

It is the same with humans. Our activities should be determined by the natural rhythms around us. We should be in harmony with our surroundings. It is this that is conducive to a happy life. Yet modern, industrialized, materialistic life has cut us from the influence of these natural cycles. For these reasons we suffer disease and feel alienated from our surroundings. This is a common feeling among modern people – they cannot relate to life or the things around them.

How does all this relate to respiration? During bygone days man was more receptive to the rhythms of nature. Perhaps he was not aware of many of them, but he nevertheless flowed with them and allowed them to influence him in the way that was intended. This includes even the process of breathing. There was absolutely no need for him to consider whether he was breathing correctly or not – his very way of life was in tune with nature and sufficient to ensure that breathing was correct. His active way of life encouraged the lungs to work at optimum efficiency. His relaxed way of life encouraged correct breathing instead of imposing an almost continual inhibition and unnatural load on the respiratory system as modern man does. Modern man through fear, competition and hatred does not allow the respiratory system to work as it should. We

take quick shallow breaths which in a way is in accordance with the fast, superficial modern way of life. Compare this with the life of a farmer, who generally has a good breathing rhythm and consequently good health. His active way of life is conducive to good, deep and slow respiration. He has the time and inclination to see himself in relationship to nature. He relaxes and tunes in with his surroundings.

There are a large number of factors that influence our breathing. For example, if we take a cold shower, automatically we must breathe deeply; it is a conditioned response. Yet most modern people rarely have a cold shower; instead they take a hot bath. Ancient man had no choice. A cold brisk atmosphere encourages deep breathing, yet modern man spends as little time as possible in the open, preferring to hibernate in air-conditioned and heated apartments. As such he loses touch with a natural stimulator of rhythmic breathing. Primitive man did not need to be taught how to breathe properly; it happened as an automatic response to his surroundings.

In comparison, the surroundings and way of life of modern man does not encourage correct breathing. It is for this reason that today most people have to learn how to breathe properly. They have to relearn what in fact is natural for them. They have to reactivate their nervous reflexes so that their breathing becomes normal and harmonious to life and health.

Those people who are very active by nature will probably already breathe correctly. The people we are mainly talking about, regarding bad breathing, are those persons who spend their lives cooped up in an office during the day and in their homes watching television or listening to the radio at night. It is these people who need to be educated to breathe properly. It is the people who develop so much mental tension during their workday that they have absolutely no energy or inclination to do anything active when they return home. Think of how many diseases are caused or at least aggravated by faulty breathing. These include asthma, bronchitis, pulmonary tuberculosis and large numbers of other ailments indirectly caused by starving our body of the oxygen nourishment that it needs as a result of shallow respiration.

Breathing capacities

A person who is reasonably relaxed and sitting inhales and exhales approximately half a litre of air (this is called tidal volume in physiology) at a time. Now if that same person expanded his chest and abdomen to the maximum that is possible and thereby drew more air into the lungs, it would be possible for him to draw in approximately an extra two litres. This is over and above the normal half litre that can be inhaled. This extra volume of air that can be inhaled is known as the inspiratory reserve volume in physiology. If after normal expiration the chest and abdomen are contracted as much as is comfortably possible, then it is possible to expel an extra one and a half litres of air from the lungs, over and above the half litre that is exhaled during normal respiration. This is referred to as expiratory reserve volume. There is also some air that will remain in the lungs even after the deepest exhalation. This is due to the fact that the lungs can never be fully deflated; the lungs can never be squeezed sufficiently by the chest and the diaphragm to remove all the air. This is known as the residual volume. It is generally in the order of one and a half litres.

Let us compare the normal volume of respiration with the maximum that can be respired:

$\frac{1}{2}$ litre (tidal volume) + 2 litres (inspiratory reserve volume) + $1\frac{1}{2}$ litres (expiratory reserve volume) = 4 litres.

This gives a total of four litres, which is eight times the normal volume of inhalation and exhalation.

Most people while sitting breathe less than half a litre of air and so their lung usage is actually less than one-eighth their capacity. It is for this reason that learning to breathe properly is so important.

Why slow breathing?

By now the advantages of deep breathing should be obvious, but what about slow breathing? Why not breathe deeply and quickly? The reason is simple. Time is required to transfer oxygen from the lungs to the blood and for carbon dioxide in the blood to be transferred into the lungs for expulsion into the air. If one breathes rapidly, then the optimum oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange is not reached in the lungs. If the

respiration is slow then the optimum transfer can be achieved. This is why depth and speed of breathing are so important in relation to each other. The deep breathing allows maximum intake for each respiration and slow breathing allows optimum exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

The mechanics of breathing

Do you know how air is drawn into your lungs? You know that it happens, but do you know why? This is important, because if you understand how you breathe, then you will know how to correct improper breathing habits.

The breathing process functions briefly as follows. Consider the lungs to be two very flexible and strong bags which can be inflated or deflated as air flows in or out of them during inhalation and exhalation respectively. The lungs have the ability to expand greatly and also can be contracted into a small space.

The lungs are surrounded at the top and sides by the thorax or the ribcage, and at the bottom by a very important flat muscle called the diaphragm. The diaphragm separates the abdomen from the lungs. The lungs are not fixed to the diaphragm or the ribcage but they nevertheless closely follow any change in shape of this enclosure.

If the ribs expand and the diaphragm moves downwards due to muscular action then there is a tendency for a vacuum to be created between the outside of the lungs and the enclosure. Since a vacuum is not normally tolerated in nature the lungs automatically expand to fill it. They expand in such a way as to assume the same shape as the enclosure. In this way air is drawn into the lungs and inhalation takes place. Similarly, when the ribs contract and the diaphragm moves upwards due to release of muscular contraction, then the lungs are squeezed. This pushes air out of the lungs. Exhalation takes place.

This is the operation of breathing. The more the lungs are expanded and contracted, the deeper will be the breathing. It is to this subject that we turn next.

Different methods of breathing

We can split the process of breathing into three parts: abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing, intercostal or middle breathing and clavicular or upper breathing.

1. *Abdominal breathing.* This type of breathing is associated with the movement of the diaphragm and the outer wall of the abdomen. When relaxed this muscle arches upwards towards the chest. During inhalation it is flattened as it moves downwards, which compresses the abdominal organs and eventually pushes the front wall, the belly, of the abdomen outwards. This movement enlarges the chest cavity, downwards, allowing the lungs to expand and thereby draw in air from the surroundings. Relaxation of the muscles which pull the diaphragm downwards allows the diaphragm to move upwards again to reduce the volume in the chest cavity and thereby cause exhalation. This form of breathing draws in the greatest amount of air for the least muscular effort. It is often hampered, however, by tight belts and clothing which prevent movement of the belly outwards.

2. *Middle breathing.* This form of breathing is achieved by movement of the ribs. During expansion of the ribcage outwards and upwards by muscular contraction, the lungs are allowed to expand – this results in air being drawn into the lungs from the front side and inhalation taking place. When the muscles which control the movement of the ribs (the intercostals) are relaxed, then the ribs move downwards and inwards. This compresses the lungs and exhalation takes place.

3. *Upper breathing.* In this case the inhalation and deflation of the lungs is achieved by raising the shoulders and collarbone. This method requires much effort for little output. Very little air is inhaled and exhaled since this movement cannot change the volume of the chest cavity very much. Women often tend to restrict themselves to this type of breathing by wearing tight brassieres, corsets and belts which restrict the abdominal and middle breathing.

4. *Yogic breathing.* Yogic or deep breathing combines all these three modes of breathing – abdominal, middle, upper – into one harmonious movement. It is this type of breathing that we are interested in developing, since only yogic breathing can give the maximum inhalation and exhalation of breath.

Preparations

The purpose of this practice is to make the practitioner aware of the three different types

of respiration, and incorporate them into yogic breathing.

Do not wear any clothing that will impede movement of your chest and abdomen.

Practise on a folded blanket, lying on a solid floor.

This exercise can be performed lying down in shavasana¹, or sitting in a cross-legged position, in which case you should make sure that your spine is as straight as possible without straining.

Place a cushion or folded blanket under the buttocks if necessary.

All breathing should be performed through the nose and not through the mouth.

The place to practise is in a well-ventilated clean room, with no breeze that might cause you discomfort.

1. ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Relax your whole body.

Place one hand on the front of the abdomen on the navel. This is to indicate to you that your abdomen does indeed move up and down.

Breathe out slowly and completely, and remember that it is this movement of your diaphragm that is responsible for your abdominal breathing.

As you breathe out feel your abdomen contract; the navel will move toward the spine.

At the end of exhalation the diaphragm will be totally relaxed and will be bowing upwards into the chest cavity.

Hold your breath for a second or so. Then breathe in.

Try not to expand the chest or move the shoulders. Feel your abdomen expand, the navel moving upwards.

Try to breathe in slowly and deeply.

At the end of inhalation your diaphragm will be bowing in the direction of the abdomen; your navel will be at its highest point.

Hold your breath for a second or two. Then exhale again, slowly and completely.

Again try to feel your navel moving towards the spine.

At the end of exhalation your abdomen will be contracted, the navel will be at its nearest point to the back.

Hold the breath for a short time, inhale and then repeat the whole process.

This is abdominal breathing.

Continue this practice for 10 to 20 respirations, or more if time permits.

2. MIDDLE BREATHING

Assume a lying or sitting position as already described. Ensure that you are as relaxed as possible. In this practice the idea is to breathe by using the movement of the ribcage.

Throughout the practice try not to move the abdomen; this is done by slightly contracting the abdominal muscles.

If you wish you can place your hands on the side of the chest to feel the expansion and contraction of the ribs. Breathe in slowly by expanding the ribcage outwards and upwards. You will find it impossible to breathe deeply because of the limitation on the maximum expansion of the chest. Remember, try not to use the abdomen for inhalation.

At the end of inhalation, hold your breath for a second or two.

Then slowly exhale by contracting the chest downwards and inwards.

Keep the abdomen slightly contracted, but without straining.

At the end of exhalation hold your breath for a short time.

Again breathe in slowly.

Repeat this process 10 to 20 times or more if time permits.

3. UPPER BREATHING

In this type of breathing you should try not to expand and contract either your abdomen or chest.

This is not so easy but try.

Keep your hands on your chest so that you can determine whether your chest is moving or not.

Slightly contract the muscles of the abdomen. Now try to inhale by drawing your collarbone and shoulders toward your chin.

This might be a little difficult at first. A good method is to inhale and exhale with a sniffing action; this automatically induces upper breathing.

Exhale by letting the shoulders and collarbone move away from the chin. There is no need to perform this type of breathing for very long; just enough to appreciate its operation, and the fact that it requires much effort and does

not introduce or expel very much air from the lungs.

We have practised and experienced the three different types of breathing.

Now we have to integrate them into one harmonious whole to achieve yogic breathing.

4. YOGIC BREATHING

This combination of the three types of breathing induces optimum volume of air into the lungs and expels the maximum amount of waste air during exhalation.

Technique

Inhale slowly by allowing your abdomen to expand.

Try to breathe so slowly that little or no sound of breath can be heard.

At the end of abdominal expansion, start to expand your chest outwards and upwards.

At the end of this movement draw your collarbone and shoulders toward your head.

This completes 1 inhalation.

The whole process should be one continuous movement, each phase of breathing merging into the next, without there being any obvious transition point.

There should be no jerks or unnecessary strain. Your breathing should be like the swell of the sea.

The rest of the body should be relaxed. Now start to exhale.

First relax your collarbone and shoulders.

Then allow your chest to move, first downwards towards the feet and then inwards.

After this allow the abdomen to contract.

Don't strain but try to empty the lungs as much as possible by drawing or pulling the abdominal wall as near as possible to the spine. Again the whole movement should be a harmonious whole.

This completes 1 round of yogic breathing.

Hold your breath for a second or two at the end of each inhalation and exhalation.

Inhale and do another round.

Do up to 5 rounds on your first day of practice. Don't strain.

Every day increase your practice by 2 rounds, or as time permits.

Ten minutes yogic breathing is a reasonable length of time to eventually aim at. With enough practice you will find that the whole

movement will occur naturally. No effort will be required.

Summary

A few minutes of yogic breathing daily can work wonders. It will make you much less susceptible to illness, and you will acquire more power, vitality and calmness in your daily activities. Your thinking and clarity of thought will improve.

The deep systematic yogic breathing will tend to retrain breathing nerve reflexes that may have ceased to be active by lack of use. In other words, at present you might be breathing only from the chest, hardly using the abdomen at all. Yogic breathing will start to make you breathe abdominally, intercostally and clavicularly during the day, and therefore allow you to inhale the full amount of air that your body requires for nourishment and good health.

To develop the yogic breathing as an automatic and normal function of the body, try to develop the habit of consciously breathing yogically for a few seconds or minutes. If you feel tired or angry, sit down, or if possible lie down, and practise yogic breathing. If you can breathe slowly then your mind will become calm and revitalized.

Notes

¹ For details on shavasana refer to Topic 5 of this lesson.

The Art and Science of Relaxation

Relaxation is an art, for there are various practices which one can develop and use to bring about relaxation of the mind and body, transforming life into an expression of wellbeing. Relaxation is also a science, for it is based on solid scientific fact.

Relaxation sounds easy – one merely closes the eyes and sleeps. But, in fact, for most people relaxation, deep relaxation, is very difficult. While resting, their minds are in a state of turmoil and their bodies are continually tossing and turning, and the muscles twitching. The biggest obstacle to overcome is for people to actually take active steps to bring about relaxation, to develop and use the various techniques that are available. Because most people cannot relax, in the real sense of the word, they will find that their whole lives will change by just being able to relax. It is such a simple thing, but it can bring wonderful results.

Relaxation is essential in everyone's life. By relaxation we mean a release of tension in both the mind and body for a period of time to allow complete rest and revitalization. This is the whole reason for sleep, but because of the tension-filled lives that most people now lead in the daytime, sleep no longer performs its functions properly. Many people find that they don't relax even during sleep – they continue to worry and try to solve their problems. This does not lead to the rest that the body and mind require. People wake up in the morning still exhausted and this state remains throughout the day. It is a vicious circle – for they again go to sleep that same night with the accumulated tensions of the day as well as the exhaustion that has accumulated from numerous nights of insufficient rest during sleep. It is no wonder that when the weekend holidays arrive many people spend much of their time sleeping – they need it. It is for this reason that modern man needs to know systematic techniques which specifically induce relaxation. Sleep is still necessary, but it needs to be sup-

plemented with techniques that quickly and efficiently remove worry and stress.

It seems to be a contradiction, but it is nevertheless true that those persons who can easily relax can do more work, can enjoy life more, need less sleep and tend to have smoother social relationships in all spheres of life. Now you might ask: "What about lazy or lethargic people, they are completely relaxed, yet not working?" Actually this is something different. A lazy person is someone who is either full of so many mental disturbances that he is unable to direct his willpower towards some activity or achievement, or his mental makeup is such that he is reluctant to do anything. This is different from relaxation. A person who can truly relax is able to recuperate mental and physical power and focus it in one direction when required. This is in fact willpower, the ability to direct one's whole being toward the attainment of one objective without distraction. Relaxation leads to strong willpower. Tension leads to dissipation of energy and attention in all directions.

During yoga classes wonderful changes can be seen in people. Many people walk into class with tension written on every line of their face and on every word they speak. Aggression pervades them. Their bodies are filled with tension, worry and unhappiness. They start practices, not necessarily difficult ones, and slowly but surely the stress and emotional turmoil begins to evaporate. They generally don't know it, but the yoga teacher can see the transformation on their faces. The students only realize their relaxation at the end of the lesson when they find that they are smiling, really smiling, not superficially, for the first time in days, and that they are actually singing to themselves as they walk down the street. They find that in comparison to before the lesson they are feeling light, carefree and have confidence in themselves. This is not an exception but the rule. These people by the

systematic process of relaxation techniques have changed their whole attitude towards themselves, to other people and life in general. This transformation may only last for an hour or so, but it leaves a wonderful impression on the mind, and helps to permanently encourage a more relaxed attitude towards life. It is a starting point from which you can fully begin to enjoy mental and physical relaxation as a normal part of your life, whether during intense activity, sleep or whatever, and not as something that you experience only occasionally, perhaps during yoga practices.

We want your life to be an expression of relaxation and joy. The way is by cultivating the ability to relax under all conditions and at all times. Everything you practise in yoga brings about relaxation and a thorough revitalization of the body and the mind, whether it is by means of asanas, pranayama, meditation practices or whatever. Yet there are some special techniques which are very simple, which specially bring about relaxation in a short period of time. These will be discussed at the end of this topic and at various stages throughout the book.

Mechanics of tension

The root cause of mental and physical tension is faulty thinking in relation to other people and to our surroundings. Our way of thinking does not harmonize with our external environment. This results in conflicts of interest between ourselves and other people. Our internal environment does not match our pattern of existence. In other words we live in the same way that a fish would out of water – continually fighting our surroundings instead of merging and flowing with life.

Consider life as a jigsaw puzzle. If each piece of the puzzle fits and is in the right position, then the picture is complete and in balance. But if some pieces don't fit or if they belong to a different jigsaw puzzle, then there is no unity. It is the same with people in the world: when there is conflict with their outer surroundings, there is disharmony. Generally there are few changes that an individual can make to the external environment, and so the change to bring harmony must come from the internal environment, namely one's attitude to life and other people. When you peacefully coexist with your surroundings, and no longer separate

yourself, then tension is removed; you begin to relax.

The factors that prevent man from fitting in with his surroundings are fear, hatred, dislike and jealousy, etc. These are accumulated since birth and cause a disruptive interaction with others. These remain mainly in the sub-conscious layers of the mind, but have an enormous influence on our daily life. Let us take a simple example. Perhaps one person is scared of the dark because as a young child he was accidentally locked up in a small, dark cupboard. The resulting fear continues into adulthood, so that now he is always afraid of the dark. Whenever he has to walk in the dark he becomes tense and fearful. This is only one example and perhaps an extreme one. Other people have inferiority complexes, others a fear of heights etc., all because of previous unpleasant experiences. Our minds are full of such fears and complexes, and these are the major causes of tension in our lives.

Physical manifestations of mental tension

Normally the body's muscles are supplied with a continuous weak influx of nerve impulses from the brain. This is known as muscular tone and maintains the muscles in a healthy and prepared condition for instant action if required.

Every psycho-physiological disturbance, every negative and destructive emotion causes conflict in the brain. This interferes with the normal tonic rhythm of the muscles and keeps them in an abnormally high state of tension. This over-activation of the muscles without the corresponding muscular activity results in a continual drain of energy from the body. This is like leaving the car lights on – after some time they drain all the power out of the battery. If you turn the lights off when they are not needed then the energy of the car battery will be conserved. It is the same with the muscles – if you turn off the tension in life then you can conserve your body energy.

Why does this drainage of energy through muscular contraction occur? The reason is simple. When you think something, the body automatically prepares itself to transfer the thought into action. The brain and body are two parts of the same unit; they are not separate. Take an example: after a hard and particularly tense day at work a man returns

home, feeling angry and looking for a way to relieve his frustrations. As a result he may become angry with the neighbour's dog for no apparent reason, but just as he begins to walk towards the dog to kick it, an inner order from the brain centres warns him that the dog will bite. This causes indecision and the muscles remain in a state of tension, ready for action. This kind of emotion, with or without translation into physical action, results in dissipation and wastage of energy. The result is chronic fatigue. For many people these emotional disturbances and their corresponding detrimental physical effects are almost a continuous part of life. People are continually feeling anger, fear, jealousy, etc., which makes them perpetually tense in mind and body and ultimately leads to disease, either physically or mentally or both.

There are further repercussions of this continuous muscular tension. The larger energy demands of the muscles require the circulatory, respiratory systems, etc. to work harder to maintain the higher supply of energy. The body operates in a higher gear. This increased demand on the body processes influences all the muscles controlling the inner organs – intestines, heart, lungs and blood vessels. The organs and the associated muscles are required to work harder and under extreme conditions for protracted lengths of time. This can eventually lead to their partial or total failure and this is when disease manifests itself. Initially the organs might work less efficiently and one's health will insidiously decline, perhaps so slowly that it cannot be noticed at first. This is inevitable, if one cannot fully relax oneself for some time during the day or night.

There are various other related outcomes of tension. For example, with emotional responses, adrenalin is automatically injected into the bloodstream from the adrenal glands. This subject has been widely discussed. It is an instinctive mechanism which prepares the body for maximum efficiency and readiness during emergencies. The adrenalin causes contraction of the muscles, constriction of blood vessels, increases the heart and respiratory rates, speeds up the thought processes and so on – all the things that are necessary to resist danger. As is to be expected, its continual presence in the bloodstream leads to continuous mus-

cular general body and mental tension. It is impossible to relax with adrenalin being continually pumped into the blood.

This adrenalin response system is absolutely necessary, but only during emergencies. An example would be if a car suddenly and unexpectedly appeared around a blind corner where you were walking. It is the adrenalin which is almost instantly released into the blood, which makes you afraid and jump to the side of the road to avoid injury. But its use is only intended for emergency situations. In the fast modern world of today this emergency response system is abused, for most people view every situation in life as a crisis. They are continually on their guard, angry, fearful, hateful, etc. The adrenalin is pumped into the bloodstream almost as fast as it can be manufactured. How is it possible for them to relax?

There are further repercussions of tension. The whole endocrine system is forced to operate at a high level, to cope with the corresponding high level of body functioning. This eventually leads to organic malfunctioning and inefficiency, which in turn is the cause of many modern ailments – diabetes, sexual sterility, ulcers, strokes and so on.

Digestive ailments are generally caused by tension, whether it is indigestion or stomach ulcers. Tension interferes with the normal digestive functions, which in turn causes the ailment. Added to this is the fact that tension leads to hasty eating habits, which results in insufficient mastication and digestion, which in turn leads to overwork of the digestive organs and their eventual reduction in efficiency.

As a body becomes weaker through tension, it simultaneously becomes less and less able to face the onset of bacterial infection. When a body is strong and healthy, it has a very powerful autotherapeutic strength to resist bacteriological disease. This power is weakened in a body that is unhealthy or tension ridden. The body becomes a target for the onset of disease.

The body is like any other machine, even though it is infinitely more complex. If it is misused or made to work abnormally it starts to develop faults. These are in the form of arthritis, heart trouble, constipation, diabetes, asthma, etc. These ailments are so prevalent

today, even children of just a few years of age are starting to manifest disease symptoms.

Removal of most ailments, their prevention, a happy life and a flight into higher consciousness is impossible unless we can start to give our mind-body complex a rest. Easier said than done you might say. Well, to be permanently relaxed we agree takes time and effort. In fact, a very high state of permanent relaxation is a very advanced state of yoga called *sahaja samadhi* (spontaneous and natural equanimity) which automatically implies higher consciousness. But systematic relaxation for a few minutes when one feels tired can be easily carried out using the methods explained in this book. The tranquillity that you gain will give you a new, more relaxed platform from which to continue your daily life, even if this sense of wellbeing only lasts for a few hours.

Mechanics of relaxation techniques

How can we relax and learn to do it well? As is often the case, for the answer we have to look towards the animals; or to those humans less disturbed by the tumultuous world, namely our children. When a child sleeps it forgets all problems. When a child sleeps it really sleeps, if it plays then it really plays and when it works it works. There is full intensity in the activity at hand. Adults have the habit of mentally working when they sleep and play, and of sleepwalking when they work. So one basic rule of relaxation is to shut off thoughts on a conscious level about things that you have completed. Don't dwell or brood over problems. Your subconscious mind actually has great powers to solve problems without any need for the thought processes to be at a conscious level. When you have fed the necessary data into the mind about any particular topic, forget it. The mind will churn out the answer when it is required. Your conscious brooding on the problem in an effort to aid the process does not help. Have more trust in the capabilities of your mind.

Relaxation techniques start by taking your consciousness away from emotionally charged thoughts and directing it to activities that are emotionally neutral such as the awareness of your breath or different parts of your body. It is almost impossible for anyone to remain or to become tense and angry when their attention is directed towards their big toe. In this

way, relaxation techniques stop the ceaseless and futile cycle of brooding on problems. Simultaneously the muscles are consciously relaxed. Most people, however, may find this a difficult process. During yoga lessons people are told to relax, and though their bodies remain stiff and tense, they believe that they are fully relaxed. It is only when the teacher lifts their arm upwards, and the arm remains straight instead of being limp, that they realize just how stiff the muscles really were. Relaxation techniques require you to consciously order your muscles to relax. Over a period of time of practice it should become possible. It is absolutely normal with animals to be able to consciously command the muscles to let go. When an animal or child relaxes or sleeps, its muscles sink towards the floor, and where possible assume the same shape as the floor. This is a good indication that there is no undue muscular tension remaining.

When you immobilize your whole body, as you do in relaxation practices, and systematically relax different parts of the body, what exactly happens? Of course the muscles are relaxed, something they probably very much need to be. Since the muscles are not being used, both the sensory nerves, which send messages from the muscles to the brain, and the motor nerves, which send messages of action from the brain to the muscles, cease to function. This cuts off your consciousness of the body. The more you are able to relax and not move the muscles, the less aware of your body you become. You feel light and euphoric because of this disconnection between mind and body. In deeper states of relaxation you will find that your mind seems to be completely detached from your body. This disconnection produces wonderful effects. The muscle cells, nerve cells, organ cells, blood vessels, etc. become totally relaxed and in this way are revitalized. And of course regions of the brain are given much needed rest from the continual influx of sensory data from the body and the outside world. Further, awareness of different parts of the body or the breath coaxes the mind away from normal patterns of worry or discontent. This has a wonderful calming influence on the mind. The amount of benefit gained from relaxation techniques is in direct proportion to the degree of mental awareness on the practice in hand. If you are not aware

of the mechanics of the practice then you will gain little or no results. But if you remain aware throughout the practice, then a few minutes relaxation in this way can be worth more, and be more refreshing than many hours sleep.

Many ailments are caused by inhibitions imposed on the body functions by the higher brain centres. By disconnecting your awareness from your body, the lower brain centres are allowed to carry out their duties without hindrance from the higher brain centres. The lower brain centres then start to restore equilibrium in the muscle body tone and endocrinal system. Further, your awareness on different parts of the body, or whatever, as prescribed by the practice, removes stress and fear. As such the adrenal glands stop injecting adrenalin into the blood system. This brings the body down to a lower level of activity. The whole body is allowed to rest from its continual stimulation.

All the previously mentioned factors interrelate with each other. A reduction in thoughts and worries reduces the adrenalin level in the blood. The reduction of adrenalin in the blood reduces the intensity of emotional and mental conflicts and so on. The overall result must be experienced to be believed: an indescribable feeling of freedom from mental turmoil. You must try it for yourself.

Mental programming

Now we have a problem. You have experienced calmness and have rested your body by performing the prescribed relaxation technique. Yet ten minutes later you meet someone whom you intensely dislike. Your tranquillity and wellbeing immediately disappear. Adrenalin is released. You become your abnormal 'normal' self-depressed, angry, aggressive and uptight self. Your mind has been programmed to respond in that manner. You had no choice but to be angry when you happened to meet that person.

Your brain is a computer and it has been conditioned since birth. You responded in the way that you did because of your mental programming. You are at the mercy of the way that your mind has been conditioned to act. The root cause of your chronic tension lies in your emotional reactions to people and situations around you. And your reaction is determined by your conditioning. Is there no

way out of this dilemma – anger, fear, etc? The answer is to change the program in your brain so that you don't respond in a negative way when you meet a particular situation. However this cannot be achieved overnight. But with patience it can be done. It is this subject that we intend to discuss in the next lesson¹.

Practices for relaxation

It may seem surprising, but the first step in attaining deep relaxation through asanas is to tense the whole body. It is only after applying muscular tension to the entire body that you can subsequently allow your whole body to relax. Think of when you did a particularly hard day's physical work. Do you remember how easy it was to lie down on the bed and rest or sleep? This assumes, of course, that you did not over-exercise your body to make it ache at the end of the day.

NAUKASANA (BOAT POSE)

This is a very good asana for relaxing the muscles and joints of the body. It brings immediate relief to people suffering from nervousness and tension.



Technique

Place a folded blanket or rug on the floor. Lie flat on the blanket facing upwards (supine). Rest your straight arms on the floor beside your body with palms facing downwards. Breathe in deeply and retain the breath inside. Simultaneously raise your legs, arms and shoulders off the ground.

Ensure that the arms and legs remain straight. Point your arms towards your feet.

Try not to raise the feet or shoulders more than 15 cms from the ground.

Stretch and tense the whole body.

Feel that every muscle is tensed.

Don't strain, but try to hold this raised position for as long as possible, while retaining your breath.

Aim at eventually maintaining the raised position for at least a slow count of 10, though

at first a count of 2 or 3 is sufficient. Then allow yourself to slump back to the floor, but without letting your head strike the ground.

Let the body sink into the floor.

Slowly count from 1 to 60.

This completes 1 round.

Perform 3 rounds.

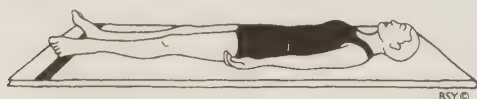
After completing 3 rounds of naukasana remain in the supine pose and relax in shavasana.

Simpler variation

Naukasana requires great effort. Those people who find it impossible to raise their body should tense the whole body while remaining on the ground. However, this alternative is much less effective than the raised position.

SHAVASANA (CORPSE POSE)

This asana is also known as mitrasana (the dead man's pose). In this topic we will consider only part 1 of shavasana².



Technique

Lie flat on your back in the supine position. Place a small pillow or folded blanket behind your head with the corners pulled under the shoulders; this ensures that your neck and shoulder muscles can relax. Don't use a thick pillow for this will tend to cause more tension by arching your neck upwards excessively.

Rest the arms in line with and on each side of the body. Leave a little space between the arms and the side of the body.

The palms should face upwards and the hands should not be clenched.

The legs should be straight and slightly separated.

Close your eyes.

Try to feel the different parts of your body in contact with the floor. This is most important for it starts to develop your awareness of the different parts of the body.

Feel the contact between the floor and the buttocks. If you feel that the muscles of the buttocks are pulled together, release them.

Keep your attention on the pressure between the floor and the buttocks for a few seconds until you think that this area of the body is relaxed.

Now try to feel the contact between the ground and the right heel for a few seconds.

Repeat the same thing with the left heel.

Now feel the contact between the floor and the right arm, right hand, left arm, left hand, middle of the back, each shoulder blade, the back of the head and finally the whole body; spend a few seconds at each point of contact.

Next, try to feel that your whole right leg is very heavy and that it is sinking into the floor. If you cannot feel this heaviness, don't worry; a little practice is necessary in the beginning. Feel the right leg become limp.

Repeat the same thing with the left leg. Feel the heaviness of the whole leg and that the leg is becoming limp and sinking into the floor. Do this for a few seconds.

In turn repeat the same thing with the right arm and the left arm.

If there is tension in your hands, perhaps your hands are partly clenched, release the muscular contraction.

Feel your shoulders slump into the pillow; remove the load from your shoulders.

Many people, because of tension, habitually hunch their shoulders. Let them sink into the pillow.

Now drop your lower jaw; let it sag, but keeping your mouth closed.

If you feel yourself frowning, try to release the muscular tension on your forehead.

Throughout the practice your worries or problems may keep appearing.

Tell these problems that they will receive your attention after a few minutes, but now you are practising shavasana. Don't suppress the thoughts if they occur; merely continue to direct your attention to the systematic relaxation of the different parts of the body in the way we have already explained.

If you have time repeat the same process again. If you have managed to carry out these instructions in the way described, with awareness, then you should find that you have attained a wonderful relaxed state, physically and mentally.

When you finish the practice, gently move and clench your hands, move your feet and slowly open your eyes.

Awareness and duration

This practice gives maximum benefits if your attention is totally involved in the practice. If you do shavasana without enthusiasm then it will not give the required results. A little mental effort is necessary, but without mental strain.

The duration of the practice should suit the time that is available; the longer the better. For normal purposes five or ten minutes is sufficient. Naukasana takes between three and four minutes, so in combination they take little time, especially in relation to the vast benefits that they can give.

Sequence

Shavasana is ideally practised after naukasana, because while it creates the tension, shavasana releases it. Shavasana can and should be practised whenever you feel tired or tense. It is such a simple practice, yet it can bring wonderful results. It should also be performed after yoga exercises or asanas, and between the practices if you feel a little tired.

Movement and covering

Try not to move your body at all during the practice of shavasana. There is a very good reason for this: even the slightest movement will bring certain muscles into play. As such you are immediately creating muscular contraction, the very thing we are trying to eliminate.

Some people may find it uncomfortable to lie on the floor with only a pillow under their head. In this case pillows may also be placed under the knees, to take up the gap between the floor and the back of the knees, and under the small of the back in the region of the waist. The support of these extra cushions will help you to attain more relaxation. Don't lie on a soft bed or mattress as this will not allow you to distinguish whether you are relaxing the muscles or not. If the atmosphere is cold or if there are any small insects in the air, cover yourself with a large sheet or blanket. But the covering should not be too heavy.

Benefits

Basically shavasana relaxes the whole physiological-psychological system. A relaxed mind allows you to see and relate to the world and the people around you in a more realistic light, carry out your work more smoothly and attain more happiness in life.

A tense mind automatically implies a tense body. From this combination result the majority of diseases which inflict mankind. Shavasana, by relaxing the mind-body complex, helps to relieve and prevent disease. Its benefits are inestimable. The reader should not believe us when we say how effective this practice is – you should try it and find out for yourself.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2 Topic 7

² Book I, Lesson 2 Topic 8

Daily Practice Program

The following programs are selected to give you maximum benefits for the time that is available. They are intended as rough guides only and the student must add or omit practices according to his preferences, capabilities and circumstances.

Practice of the full program is recommended for maximum benefits physically, mentally and spiritually, and will fully prepare you for future practices especially the advanced techniques of kriya yoga. However, those who don't have the time to do all the practices should try to do as many as they can and aim to eventually

achieve practice of the full program. If necessary the practices can be divided so that some are done in the morning and others in the evening, whenever time is available.

From our experience we recommend that the techniques contained in each lesson be thoroughly mastered before progressing on to the next set of practices. Generally this takes a minimum of fifteen days and on the average one month. This is very important and an essential prerequisite for the eventual success of your sadhana.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 53 minutes		
Jala Neti	—	4
Goolf Ghoornan	10 clockwise	
	10 anticlockwise	2
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 clockwise	
	10 anticlockwise	3
Utthanasana	10 rounds	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	3
Chakki Chalanasana	10 clockwise	
	10 anticlockwise	3
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	20 rounds	3
Greeva Sanchalanasana	10 stage 1	1
	10 stage 2	1
	10 stage 3	3
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Shavasana	—	10
Breathing	—	10
		53

Program 2: duration ½ hour

Jala Neti	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	6 each way	2
Utthanasana	6 rounds	2
Kauva Chalasana	—	2
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	15 rounds	2
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Shavasana	—	7
Breathing	—	5
		30

Program 3: duration ¼ hour

Jala Neti	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Kauva Chalasana	—	2
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	15 rounds	2
Naukasana	3 rounds	3
Breathing	—	3
		15

Lesson 2

If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear to man as it is –
infinite.

—*William Blake*

Hatha Yoga: Danta Dhauti

Danta dhauti, one of the shatkarmas¹, consists of a series of simple practices which clean various organs and regions of the head. These practices are *danta moola dhauti* (cleaning of the teeth and gums), *jihva moola dhauti* (cleaning of the tongue), *kapal randhra dhauti* (washing the skull), *karna dhauti* (cleaning the ears) and *chakshu dhauti* (washing the eyes).

These practices, as well as *jala neti*¹, are concerned either directly or indirectly with the main senses of the body – hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting. As such they are important in enabling us to gain the best possible perception of the world around us. Remember, our sensory perception is dependent on the state of the associated organs. Therefore the following practices, though perhaps seeming rather trivial and simple, are a valuable aid in being able to communicate with and relate to the outside world.

The ancient yogis realized the necessity of maintaining the sensory organs in the optimum condition. This is clearly stated in the traditional text on practical yoga, the *Hatha Yoga Samhita*: “The cleaning of the teeth, mouth, tongue, ears and the nasal cavities is the first duty of the yogic aspirant and should be performed every morning without fail.”

DANTA MOOLA DHAUTI

The Sanskrit word *danta* means ‘teeth’, *dhauti* means ‘wash’ and *moola* means ‘root’. Therefore this practice is concerned with cleaning the teeth and gums.

Utensils

The usual utensil used today is the toothbrush. Yet many authorities have strongly condemned its use without regular sterilization. It is pointed out that toothbrush bristles become a breeding ground for germs and bacteria. During daily use these are transmitted into the mouth. Further, hard bristles tend to tear

and damage the gums, especially when the cleaning action is very harsh.

In India today the traditional method of cleaning the teeth is by means of a twig from a neem tree. The twig is usually about fifteen centimetres long and half a centimetre thick and it has good alkaline and astringent properties. The end of the stick is chewed until it forms bristles. These are then used to brush the teeth and gums. Both chewing the end of the stick and using it as a brush makes the teeth and gums strong and clean. After use the stick is thrown away.

This method is probably impractical for most people. If this is the case, then use a soft bristled brush to clean the teeth and try to clean the brush as often as possible. The gums should be cleaned with the index finger making a hard, rubbing motion over both the inner and outer gums. You should try to clean your teeth at least twice every day, and even better after each meal.

Dentifrice

The important qualities of a dentifrice are that it is sufficiently abrasive to remove ingrained stains on the teeth, germicidal to destroy bacteria, as well as being able to wash the teeth and gums.

The ancient yogis always made their own tooth powder out of catechu, alum, myrobalan and the ash of burnt coconut shells in the proportion 1:6:1:2. However, these substances are not readily available and so most of us will have to stick with the toothpastes of today, the best of which are generally available at ayurvedic pharmacies, health and macrobiotic food stores. Additionally, some excellent dentifrices are wood ash or lemon juice which can be applied on a brush, or the rind of a lemon which can be rubbed up and down on the teeth and gums. This is a particularly good method of removing tarnish from the teeth.

The importance of cleaning the teeth and gums

The importance of maintaining healthy gums and teeth is not appreciated by many people. The mouth is the gateway to the body and a favourite breeding ground for bacteria. Some of these germs proceed further into the body while many remain in food particles trapped in the teeth cavities. The vulnerable time for tooth decay and the build-up of bacteria in the teeth and gums is in the first half an hour or so after meals. It is for this reason that ideally the teeth and gums should be cleaned immediately after each meal.

Diet also has a large part to play in the health of the teeth and gums. This is illustrated by the fact that there are many cases of primitive tribes who have perfect sets of teeth, yet have never seen a toothbrush in their life. Diets which are very rich in sugar seem to have a noticeable deleterious influence on teeth and gums, because sugary foods are very quickly converted into acids, which in turn attack the enamel or protective lining of the teeth.

Regular cleaning of the teeth and gums, together with a reduction in the intake of sugary food and the adoption of a sensible vitamin-rich diet is therefore the only sure way to prevent dental decay and pyorrhoea, as well as the accompanying toothache and bad breath originating from the mouth. Remember also that many authorities say that bad teeth and gums and infections of this area have a harmful influence on the general health of the whole body.

JIHVA MOOLA DHAUTI

The Sanskrit word *jihva* means 'tongue' and *moola* means 'root'. This practice is therefore concerned with cleaning the tongue and its root.

The tongue is a vital organ of the body, yet very few people ever seriously think about cleaning it. All of us have at some time or another noticed a thick layer of yellow slime on the upper surface of the tongue, especially when we feel a little 'under the weather'. This coating on the tongue actually consists of impurities that have been removed from the body. It indicates that there is some inner disorder or accumulation of toxins that the body is desperately trying to expel.

Failure to remove the impurities on the tongue can aggravate ailments within the body, particularly digestive problems. Remember these impurities can act as breeding grounds for bacteria which in turn can contaminate food being eaten. So regular cleaning of the tongue is very important in maintaining a healthy body. The practice is very simple and takes no more than a minute or so.

Technique

Wash the hands thoroughly, making sure that the finger nails are perfectly clean.

Join the index, middle and ring fingers of one hand so that the tips are in line with each other. Carefully push them into the mouth and as far towards the back of the throat as is possible without retching.

Rub the root of the tongue slowly and thoroughly for a few minutes.

Simultaneously try to cough out any phlegm and other impurities that are in the throat.

This should be sufficient to remove any impurities from the tongue.

Time and duration

This practice should be performed preferably before breakfast. This is important for one might otherwise tend to retch as the fingers are pushed into the back of the throat.

Try to practise at least once every day, if not as often as time available will permit. Two minutes rubbing the back of tongue and two minutes milking the upper and lower surfaces is sufficient.

KAPAL RANDHRA DHAUTI

Kapal randhra is the upper hollowed region of the head, which can be clearly seen on a newly born baby. Therefore, this practice is concerned with washing the upper part of the head. It is a very simple process and requires little description. One must merely wash the head vigorously and thoroughly with cold water. This brings about a soothing influence in the whole brain. It is very useful when you feel tired or sluggish, as it instantly brings wakefulness and vitality.

A further variation of kapal randhra is kapal dhauti. One merely presses the temples on each side of the forehead with two thumbs, making small circling movements. Do this for a minute

or so and then repeat the same movement rotating the thumbs in the opposite direction. This again brings relaxation to the brain and is especially useful if you have a headache.

KARNA DHAUTI

The word *karna* means 'ear', and this practice is concerned with cleaning the ears.

The outer portion of the ear consists of a short tube or canal about four centimetres in length, running from the outside to the inside of the head. Inside the tube there are a few hairs which prevent insects and other foreign bodies from entering the inner regions of the head and the eardrum at the end of the canal. This outer canal also contains various glands, which secrete wax to protect the deeper structures of the ear. For perfect hearing, this outer canal must be unimpeded so that the sound vibrations in the air can cause the ear to vibrate. Sometimes the glands produce too much wax which blocks the canal; or sometimes wax accumulates, even though it is produced in correct amounts, and is not removed in the way that it should be. This can easily reduce one's hearing capabilities.

A varied assortment of methods and utensils are used to clean the ears. Some people even use toothpicks or matchsticks. These devices are not advised for they can easily damage the eardrums. The best method is to gently place the small finger in the ear canal and rotate the finger cyclically a number of times. A slight pressure should be applied against the ear walls to dislodge any unnecessary wax. Remove the finger and direct the head and ear canal downwards to allow any dry wax to drop out. Repeat the same procedure but using the index finger. There should be a layer of wax on your fingers after completing the practice. Repeat with the other ear.

Perform this practice every week or so, but make sure that your fingernails are short and clean.

Benefits

Many ear ailments are caused by blockage of the eustachian tubes. The ear is divided into three chambers: the outer, middle and inner sections. Sound vibrations are transmitted from the environment through the outer ear and into the middle ear via the eardrum, which

also separates the outer ear from the middle ear. There is no direct connection between the two chambers. For perfect hearing the pressure of air in the middle ear must be the same as that outside the body – atmospheric. This is brought about by means of the two eustachian tubes, which connect each ear to the back of the throat. These tubes are about the same diameter as a pencil lead and easily become blocked with mucus deposits. The best way to remove this type of problem is by practising *jala neti*, as this will help to draw out any blockages from these tubes¹.

CHAKSHU DHAUTI

This practice involves washing the eyes with clean, lukewarm water whenever time permits. This can be done when taking a wash or bath, making sure that no soap enters the eyes.

EYE TONING TECHNIQUES

In this topic we are concerned with practices which bring about the best possible health of the head region and associated organs. Though not part of *danta dhauti*, there are various other simple techniques to help bring the eyes into optimum condition. We will briefly discuss these techniques.

One should remember that there are two distinct causes of eye ailments. Defective vision such as short sightedness (*myopia*), long sightedness (*hypermetropia*) etc. are generally caused by mental strain or excessive use of the eyes, such as during extensive book study. Eye diseases, on the other hand, are caused by pathological changes in the structure of the eye due to disturbances within the eye itself or in the body as a whole. This may be due to a build-up of toxins in the body or an inadequate diet.

Yoga practices can help to eliminate and prevent either of the two types of eye ailments. In a general sense, regular practice of *asanas* and *pranayama* are wonderful methods of counteracting eye ailments for they eliminate toxins from the body. Further, the mental relaxation that one can obtain through all yoga practices counteracts eyestrain, even while reading a book or doing work which involves deep concentration. In this way functional defects are less likely to occur.

Jala neti has definite beneficial influences on the eyes¹. It stimulates the nerves of the eyes which in turn activates and tones the associated muscles and organs. The blood flow to the eyes is also increased for a short duration which helps to flush out impurities and toxins.

1. Palming

Sit comfortably, close the eyes and face the sun. Feel the heat of the sun warming the eyes. Keep the eyes closed and vigorously rub the palms of both hands together until they are hot.

Place the palms over the closed eyes. Feel the warmth and energy entering the eyes.

Do this for a minute or so.

Repeat 2 or 3 times.

This practice helps to revitalize and relax the eyes.

2. Distant and near viewing

Sit so that you can see the horizon or so that you can see far into the distance. Focus your eyes on the nose tip.

Then focus on an object in the far distance.

Focus on the nose tip again.

Repeat this as many times as possible, then close the eyes.

This practice is very useful for exercising the eye muscles, which brings about changes in the focal length of the lenses of the eyes.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: An Introduction

The meaning of the Sanskrit word *asana* is 'a steady and comfortable posture'. It is often believed that asanas are physical exercises. And of course this is true; they do have a profound influence on the body, but this does not convey their full significance. Each person is made up of three aspects: body, mind and consciousness, which merge together to constitute our whole being. Asanas aim at influencing all these three aspects and moulding and yoking them into one harmonious whole.

As such one should try to think of asanas not as physical poses but as states of being. Correct performance of asanas requires participation of one's whole being, with awareness of oneself in relation to the physical position and movement, the breath, relaxation of the muscles and so forth. If asanas were only physical exercises then it would be quite acceptable to think about work, breakfast or whatever while performing them. But this is not the case. The practice of asanas requires active involvement of one's entire being as fully as possible.

Health of mind and body

It is impossible to work actively in life with an unhealthy mind and body. This applies to work and play as well as to spiritual aspiration. The fundamental requirement is the healthiest possible mind and body. The ancient yogis realised this thousands of years ago and for this reason developed the system of asanas. The asanas were tested thoroughly by the personal experience of these pioneers. Asanas evolved slowly through practice, and because of this, they have withstood the test of time. The body and mind of man thousands of years ago was little different to the mind and body of man today. As such asanas are as useful in the present age as they were to the ancient originators. Many modern systems, in all fields of activity, are often based only on a few years experience; they rarely last for very

long periods and are usually modified because of inadequacies in their makeup. Asanas, on the other hand, are a well-tested system for attaining mental and physical health.

The prime aim of asanas is to help us tread the path to higher consciousness so we can begin to understand and know our relationship with existence. We cannot even consider attaining higher awareness if we are ill with disease, aches and pains or mental depression. Therefore, the initial purpose of practising asanas is to eliminate these afflictions and disturbances. Asanas loosen up the joints of the body, stretch and tone the muscles and remove poisons which tend to accumulate in various parts of the body. They also harmonize the nervous system and with a gentle massage they improve the functioning of all the internal organs such as the heart, lungs, abdominal organs, endocrinal glands, blood vessels and so on. This slowly but surely leads to the best possible physical health.

The mind and body are not really separate entities; they are two parts of the human organism. The mind is the controller or the computer and the body is the machinery. They are closely interrelated. Improvement in the general health of the body automatically helps to bring about positive mental changes.

We will point out that mental problems or tension, as well as an unhealthy body, are the prime cause of most diseases which afflict mankind. The body has remarkable auto-therapeutic powers. It naturally has great strength to resist the onset of disease by means of antibodies which counteract bacteriological growth. A body that is unhealthy and a mind that is tense tend to whittle away these powers making the body more vulnerable to illness. Asanas help the body to resist disease by bringing the mind and body into the best possible condition. A body saturated with poisons and toxins is a breeding ground for germs and is conducive to attack by disease. Asanas

help to purify the body and thereby prevent diseases occurring. Some ailments are caused by malfunctioning of internal organs – blood pressure, heart attack, diabetes and so on. Asanas prevent this happening by bringing all the relevant organs into good working condition, improving nerve connections and also by reducing chronic mental stress, the latter being the root cause of most of the problems in the first place.

Asanas not only prevent disease; they also help to eliminate many types of diseases for the same reasons as given in the previous paragraph.

The influence of asanas on one's mental outlook

The stepping stone to higher awareness and a happy life is an optimistic attitude. Asanas help to change and reorientate a person's mental outlook. How? There are various answers, which we will discuss in turn.

Firstly, asanas greatly influence the functioning of the endocrine system. This system exerts vast control over our lives. It carries out an uncountable number of indispensable functions within the body and it influences our physical appearance, emotional outlook and in fact much of our behaviour and attitude towards life. A person who has a healthy endocrine system is generally optimistic, clear in thought and positive in action. A person with a system that is out of balance will tend to be unhealthy, pessimistic and either excessively active or inactive physically and mentally. Endocrinology is a very interesting science encompassing reproduction, digestion, emotional reactions and in fact all aspects of life.

The endocrine system consists of various glands located throughout the body, which secrete special substances called hormones. Each of these hormones has a specific function to perform in the body. They act as triggers which prompt the various organs into higher or lower levels of activity as required, or in some cases such as the women's menstrual cycle they initiate and terminate various processes. These hormones also interact with and modify the activities of each other. For optimum health the entire system must be in balance and perfectly coordinated, each gland secreting the required hormone in the

right quantity at the right time. If there is disharmony in the endocrinal system then there will be a malfunction in one or more of the bodily processes and possibly in the emotional makeup of one's personality. There is such an intricate interrelationship between the various glands that one malfunctioning gland can cause disruption of the whole system. Asanas are designed to rectify overactivity or sluggishness of individual glands as well as harmonize the control centre of the system in the brain. This is why even simple asanas can sometimes bring about astonishingly quick benefits.

Endocrinal disorders are not usually organic – they are generally functional. In other words, the individual glands are capable of working correctly but don't, perhaps because of stress or misuse of the body. This can be compared to a car. If the petrol mixture is too rich, or the air and petrol intake pipes are blocked, the car will cease to work or will not run smoothly. It still has the capacity to work properly and will do so when the necessary adjustments are made. With the endocrine system the functional breakdown may be due to ineffective nerve impulses or insufficient supply of oxygenated blood, perhaps due to incorrect breathing and so on. Asanas automatically and gently rectify this condition, bringing the system into proper working order again.

This system has a major influence on our emotional makeup, which is intimately connected with our mental processes. As such, improvement of this system alone through the practice of asanas can result in profound changes in our attitude to life.

Secondly, asanas bring about harmony in the various other bodily systems. These systems are rhythmical in nature and include the blood, nervous, respiratory, digestive as well as the endocrine system which we have already mentioned. These systems are all intimately related to each other. When the proper working relationship between these bodily processes is lost there is a resultant loss of health and body efficiency. This has repercussions on our emotional and mental wellbeing. Asanas coordinate these various systems bringing rhythm and balance into the body-mind complex.

Thirdly, asanas have subtle influences on the body, which perhaps a physiologist would

tend to deny. Surrounding and permeating the whole body is an energy field which is normally imperceptible to our senses. In yoga this is called the *pranamaya kosha* (energy sheath) and is commonly known as the etheric body by people who have developed their psychic potential. This subject will be fully discussed later¹. However, we will say that this concept should not be taken lightly, for scientists in Russia have actually detected and photographed this energy body. There it is called bioplasma or bioluminescence. This energy travels in and around the body in specific pathways, which in yoga are known as nadis. These pathways easily become blocked and prana becomes congested in certain areas, which can lead to physical and mental disorders. Asanas encourage free flow of prana and thereby facilitate good health. Further, this energy body is intimately connected to the mind. As such the uninhibited flow of prana brought about by asanas, leads to mental equilibrium and calmness.

Fourthly, asanas automatically bring about a change in breathing. Rapid and irregular breathing signifies tension in mind and body, whereas slow, deep and rhythmical breathing indicates calmness and wellbeing. Asanas bring about mental and emotional equanimity by slowing down the breathing and deepening the inhalation and exhalation.

Fifthly, awareness is an essential feature of the practice of asanas. While performing asanas one should be fully aware of what is being done and not allow the mind to wander here and there. Without awareness asanas are not really asanas, no matter how well they may be physically performed. This awareness of breath movement while doing asanas draws our attention away from entanglement with superficial worries and problems, at least for a period of time. This includes relaxation of one's personality. It may be temporary, but it assists in bringing about permanent changes in a person's mental and emotional makeup.

Our emotional and mental attitudes and feelings are noticeably reflected in our physical poise and expressions. If we are angry we tend to hunch our shoulders; if we are tense and worried we frown; if we feel nervous we shake and breathe quickly and so on. Conversely, if we feel happy we simultaneously feel light and more flexible in the body. These

are mental and emotional attitudes reflected in the body. This is also a two way process – the body can induce corresponding changes in the mind. Asanas make the body relaxed, strong, light, supple, free of aches and pains and this in turn brings about emotional and mental calmness and confidence.

As we have already mentioned, asanas are very useful in eliminating diseases. This alone is conducive to mental and emotional stability. Let us take an example: constipation. This ailment is generally accepted by medical science to be caused initially by mental tension, though there are other factors such as lack of exercise and unsuitable food habits. When a person suffers from constipation there is also a feeling of heaviness, not only in the body, but also in the mind. One's thinking processes become dulled and pessimistic. Asanas help to remove constipation so that one simultaneously becomes more light-hearted and carefree. By removing or easing physical ailments, asanas also bring about a corresponding relaxation and freedom of one's personality.

All the previous factors that we have listed interrelate with each other. The overall result is a notable and positive change in one's subconscious and conscious thinking processes.

Asanas as a step to higher awareness

From the previous discussion it is clear that asanas exercise a profound influence on the mind-body complex. Regular practice of asanas helps to make one master of the mind and body, and not the slave. The beautiful, strong body aimed at in various body building systems, without a correspondingly developed mind, is as insufficient as a highly intellectual mind contained within a weak, sickly body. The ideal is to have both a strong, healthy mind and body. This is the aim of asanas as well as yoga in general.

The practice of asanas should not be divorced from the other aspects of yoga. It is an integral part of yoga techniques with the purpose of leading each of us to higher awareness. This was why the ancient originators of yoga developed asanas and other yogic practices, though this is rarely considered today. The ancient yogis aimed at transcending the normal limitations of the mind and body. Their aim was to transcend individuality and to

achieve self-realization. In this context, asanas were not intended specifically to develop the mind and body. This was a means to an end. Their aim was to make the body so perfect and the subconscious mind so calm and trouble free that these aspects of individual existence could be forgotten. Consciousness could be disentangled from the troubles of the mind and body. When the aches and pains and ailments of the body are removed and one is emotionally and mentally relaxed, then one automatically ceases to be aware of the physical body and the superficialities of the mind. In this way the fetters of individuality can be released and one's true nature – pure, infinite, all pervasive consciousness – can be realized.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Asanas: Rules and Preparations

Guidelines to be observed during asana practice

The place of practice should be clean, quiet and well ventilated. There should be no bad smells, dampness or cold draughts. The area should be uncluttered with furniture and other objects. Try to use the same place every day to build up an atmosphere of peace.

Take a wash or bath and go to the toilet before the practice if possible.

Wait for at least three hours after food before doing asanas. You can take food after your asana program if you wish.

If possible do *neti* before commencing your practice. Either *jala neti*¹ or *sutra neti*² is suitable.

The best time to practise is before breakfast, early in the morning, though other times are also suitable. In fact you will find that asanas are much easier to do in the afternoon and evening, because the body is always stiffer in the morning. But nevertheless, the morning is the best time for there are peaceful vibrations in the air, and you gain greater benefits and a good preparation for the coming day. Also in the early morning there are fewer pressing distractions to drag you away from your practice, either physically or mentally.

The duration of practice should be regulated according to your available time, though the longer the better. Don't set your aims too high in the beginning; only do as much practice as you can easily manage every day without fail. Fifteen minutes practice every day is better than one hour's practice on one day, none for three days and then again one hour's practice. Many people set themselves an unrealistic program which they do for the first few days, and then the enthusiasm slowly fades and eventually they don't practise at all. So be realistic in choosing the duration of your program, and once you have set it, stick to it regularly.

The program of asanas should be carefully chosen. The order of practising different

asanas is very important to gain maximum benefits. Certain asanas supplement each other, whereas others detract from each other. Therefore it is important to choose a systematic program. This will be discussed as the asanas are introduced.

If you feel physically or mentally tired before or during the program perform relaxation asanas such as *shavasana* and *naukasana*³. Don't use excessive force to attain the final positions of the asanas. Your muscles should be slowly encouraged to stretch over a period of time – not stretched and severely strained in one day. You are trying to develop mental control over the muscles and to do this one should try to will the muscles to relax and then they will automatically stretch.

Clothing should be as light as possible under climatic conditions, so that free movement is not impeded.

Breathing should be through the nose, not through the mouth. It should be as deep and rhythmical as possible.

A blanket or rug should be placed on the floor at the place of practice. Don't use a spongy mattress and don't practise on the bare floor.

Close your eyes as much as possible throughout the practice. This will help to intensify your awareness.

The less physical effort that is required the better. The aim is to perform asanas with as little tension or muscular effort as possible. Often we see practitioners grating their teeth while performing asanas. In the execution of the movement to and from the final pose and while in the final position one should check that the maximum number of muscles are relaxed. This applies particularly to beginners, for eventually as you gain control over the muscles this relaxation will occur naturally.

Don't hurry under any circumstances. If you lack time to complete your daily program, leave out a few asanas and do the others at a normal slow, relaxed pace.

Remember that although you should be relaxed you should not sleep or feel drowsy. You should be as wide awake as possible to gain maximum benefits. If you are sleepy, take a wash or a bath, preferably a cold one and then continue your practice.

Don't underestimate the importance of the movements to and from the final poses. They should be done slowly, smoothly, with control and in synchronization with the breath. If you feel mentally or physically tired after the program of asanas, it is a sure sign that you are doing something wrong – perhaps trying too hard or tensing the muscles too much, or tending to concentrate too hard. If you can't see the fault seek expert guidance. You should feel calmness and strength in both mind and body at the end of your practice, far more than when you started.

Don't try to stretch your muscles further than is comfortable. With persistent and regular practice the muscles will elongate, whether you are at present as stiff as a board or as supple as a piece of rubber. The mental attitude is very important in this respect. If you autosuggest to yourself that you want the muscles to stretch, then the mind will automatically take steps to prepare the body to attain what you want. Remember, it is the mind that is the controller.

There are no specific limitations on the practice of asanas with regard to age or sex. However, people who have specific illnesses should not do certain asanas. Full information on this will be given with the description of each asana. For example, a person who has high blood pressure should definitely not attempt inverted asanas, or people with a slipped disc should not try forward bending asanas. These are more obvious examples; there are many such contra-indications which will be fully discussed.

Don't practise asanas if you are ill with a cold or diarrhoea etc. At these times the body is directing its energy to specific areas to fight the illness; let it perform its duties unimpeded.

Proceed from the simpler asanas to the more difficult ones. That is why it is necessary to follow the order outlined in this book as it progressively leads from the simpler to the more advanced techniques. We have mentioned this point for we know of various people who have strained themselves by prematurely

attempting asanas that were too difficult for them.

Asanas are not competitive. If you perform your asanas in a group don't compare yourself with others. We all have differently shaped bodies and some people are able to stretch easier than others. But this is not indicative of how well a person is performing an asana, for one person may physically perform an asana perfectly, yet his awareness is jumping from here to there; while another person may not physically perform the asana very well but his awareness may be on the movements and the breath. In this case the latter is performing the asana much better than the former.

The importance of relaxing the muscles

In most systems of physical culture, gymnastics, etc., the muscles are brought into play during contraction and strengthened. During most asanas the emphasis is on stretching the muscles. The muscles cannot stretch themselves because their mode of action is through contraction. In asanas the muscles are stretched by assuming various body positions which will automatically apply an elongation to particular muscles. A muscle can be slowly and gradually stretched by practice, so that it can eventually extend well beyond its normal limitations. This elongation squeezes out stagnant blood and allows it to be replaced by pure oxygenated blood when the muscle resumes its normal shape.

To stretch the muscles it is important that they are fully relaxed. If your muscles are tense they will automatically resist any attempt made to stretch them. This relaxation of the muscles can be developed with practice as you systematically gain control over them.

Slow and controlled movements and co-ordination with breath

These are necessary to induce calmness in the body and mind. Quick and sudden movements use up excessive energy, whereas the object of asanas is to conserve energy. For this reason they are done slowly. Asanas also aim at slowing down the breathing rate to improve the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the lungs as well as to induce mental tranquillity. Muscular control is an essential feature and aim of asanas and is attained by slow movements, not by sudden

jerks. The muscles are to be stretched and this can only be done if they are relaxed; fast movements imply excessive muscular tension. During slow movements it is possible to relax the maximum number of muscles not needed for the movement.

Maintenance of final static poses

The final position is the most important part of the asana practice. During this time specific parts of the body are influenced. The body is held in such a way that certain muscles are stretched to the limit of present flexibility and certain organs are given the best possible squeeze or massage and extra blood is directed to or removed from particular regions. This period of immobility is the time when profound and beneficial changes are occurring in the body. With some asanas it is also a time when deep states of concentration can be reached if the final position is held for extended periods of time.

Correct, relaxed respiration is essential in the final static position in order to accentuate the influence of the asana on the body by increasing the massage of the internal organs and by stimulating the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide through the blood.

Awareness

We have already emphasized the importance of avoiding mental tension caused by forced concentration. You should be aware of your mental patterns and extraneous thoughts that occur while practising asanas, but at the same time you should try to be aware of the asana being performed. All other thoughts – a cup of tea, worries about business or whatever – will automatically evaporate. The result will be calmness and peace of mind.

What facet of the practice should one be aware of during the performance of an asana? This will be explained as we cover each asana. However, the following is a rough guide to the possibilities.

While learning the asana your attention should be on correct performance. You can also be aware of relaxing as many muscles as possible to make the asana easier to perform and more effective. You can be aware of the physical movement, or of the breath while assuming the final pose. In the final position you can be aware of your breath, mantra or the

parts of the body that the asana particularly influences.

Relaxation after completion of asanas

This is nearly as important as the asana itself. When one completely relaxes, the organs and muscles return to their normal shape. As such they are flooded with an influx of purified blood to replace the blood that has been squeezed out in performance of the asana. During this resting state the circulatory and respiratory systems also return to normal. This is necessary before one starts the next asana.

During this practice of relaxation one should try to relax the body and mind completely maintaining awareness of the body and the breath.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

Asanas: Practice

The following two asanas, although reasonably simple, are very beneficial for the whole body, particularly the back and abdomen. The nerves in the spinal cord, the vital link between the body and the brain, as well as the internal organs of digestion are stretched, massaged and revitalized.

Both of these asanas have been taught to us by animals, which perform similar body movements without having to think about them or train themselves as human beings do. They are in tune with nature and instinctively know what is best for their body.

SAITHALYASANA (ANIMAL RELAXATION POSE)

Most of us have seen various animals, particularly dogs and cats, sit on the floor, fold their rear legs under their body, stretch and tense their front limbs and then rest their heads between the front paws. In this position they are completely relaxed. This asana is so called because it imitates this action.



Technique

Place a blanket on the floor.

Sit on the blanket with the legs outstretched in front of the body. Separate the knees, moving the legs apart.

Bend the right leg and place the sole of the right foot against the inside of the left thigh, allowing the whole of the right leg to rest on the floor.

Carefully fold your left leg to the outside of the body so that the foot lies beside the left buttock.

Place your hands on your right ankle.

Relax your whole body.

Exhale.

Then as you inhale, slowly raise your arms upwards, keeping them together and straight until they are eventually vertical above the head at the end of inhalation.

Then exhale, twist the trunk slightly and bend forwards over the right knee.

Try to touch your forehead on the ground directly in front of the right knee.

At first this may be a little difficult, but with practice it becomes possible.

If you can't touch the floor with your forehead, merely bend forwards as far as possible.

Your hands should touch the floor in front of the body, with the arms kept straight, though preferably slightly bent and completely relaxed.

Relax your whole body.

This is the final position.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Don't strain, but try to stay in the final position for as long as you can manage. Then as you inhale, raise the arms, head and trunk until your arms are vertical. Exhale and lower your arms.

Now adjust the body position so that the left sole presses against the right thigh, and the right leg is folded backwards.

Repeat the same procedure but now bending over the left knee.

Breathing, awareness and duration

The breathing should be as described in the technique, ensuring that it is synchronized with the body movements.

When you are fully familiar with the asana then close your eyes and become aware of the movement of the body and breath. In the final pose you should be aware of deep and slow breathing.

The duration in the final position should only be for as long as you are comfortable. With practice try to maintain the final pose for a minute or so on each side of the body

providing this does not cause any excessive discomfort.

Benefits

This is a good asana to loosen up the legs and prepare them for meditative asanas.

Most people have very stiff spines, so stiff in fact that it is difficult to believe the spinal column is composed of thirty-one separate bones which allow suppleness in the back and neck. This asana helps to loosen up the spine and return it to its correct condition. In the final position the abdomen is compressed, which gives a valuable massage to the internal organs, especially those concerned with digestion. This massage squeezes out stagnant, impure blood and encourages it to flow back to the heart and lungs for oxygenation.

The deep breathing is most important for it accentuates the massage imparted to the abdominal organs.

MARJARI-ASANA (CAT STRETCH POSE)

Watch a cat closely and you will see that it periodically stretches its spine upwards and downwards. This asana imitates this action, and though it is very simple it is very useful in ensuring the best possible health of the practitioner. A cat yawns at the same time; you can do the same if you wish, but it is not a traditional part of the asana.

Technique

Kneel on the ground.

The knees and the feet may be separated slightly or kept together; either way is suitable for this practice.

Lean forwards and place both hands flat on the floor in front of the knees.

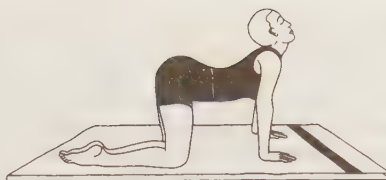
The hands should be positioned so that when your trunk is horizontal the arms are vertical; in other words the hands should be directly below the shoulders.

The thighs should be vertical.

Relax your whole body.

Arch your back upwards while exhaling so that it forms a hump.

Contract your abdomen to remove as much air as possible from your lungs. At the end of exhalation your head should be between your arms facing towards the thighs.



Then slowly depress your back and raise your head as you breathe in.

At the end of inhalation, the head should be facing upwards and the spine should be arched as much as possible in a concave curve (see illustration).

Expand your abdomen fully to fill the lungs with the maximum amount of air. Then raise your back upwards, while lowering the head and breathing out. Repeat the whole process again.

Practise as many rounds as time will permit.

Breathing and duration

Breathing should be as described, making sure that the abdomen is contracted as much as possible at the end of exhalation and expanded as much as possible at the end of the inhalation.

Try to perform the movement and breathing as slowly as possible, with full awareness. Aim to make the downward and upward movements have a duration of at least five seconds each.

This asana can be done for as long as you have time available. Ten full rounds is reasonable for general purposes. If you have any particular ailment, longer is prescribed.

Benefits

This asana supplements the previous asana (saithalyasana) in that it loosens up the spine. Those people with rigid spines and chronic back or neck ache are especially advised to do marjari-asana regularly.

The pelvic and abdominal regions are well massaged, with a beneficial influence on the internal organs. The organs of digestion, reproduction and elimination are innervated

by nerves in and around the spine. Marjari-asana gently stretches and stimulates these spinal nerves. This has a supplementary influence which improves the function of the internal organs. Many women suffer from ailments of their sexual organs. This asana has been found to be very useful in improving the health of these organs and helping to eliminate reproductive disorders. Women suffering from menstrual irregularities and leucorrhoea have achieved enormous benefits from regular practice of this asana. At the time of menstruation this asana can help give relief from menstrual cramps.

This is an excellent asana for post-pregnancy cases as it tightens the abdominal muscles and encourages the abdomen to resume its normal shape.

Asanas: Simple Meditative Asanas

In the previous lesson we described eight exercises to loosen up the body, particularly the legs, in preparation for meditative asanas and other types of asanas¹. In this topic we will explain two of the simplest sitting positions which can be used for various meditation, pranayama and kriya yoga practices to be described in this book.

Preparation for classical meditative asanas

The following two asanas are very useful in the earlier stages of practice. However, the best sitting positions are the classical meditative asanas. These are *padmasana* (lotus pose), *siddhasana* (accomplished pose for men) and *swastikasana* (auspicious pose)². Your aim should be eventually to sit in one of these classical asanas. Therefore, the exercises previously given for loosening up the legs should be continued so that the more advanced meditative asanas can be mastered in the future¹.

SUKHASANA (EASY POSE)

This is the easiest of the meditative asanas and everyone should be able to sit in it. Although it may be used for meditation practices, it has one basic drawback: most of the weight of the body is supported by the small area of contact between the floor and the buttocks. After a period of time this area soon becomes a little painful. However, this can be overcome to a degree by using a cushion under the buttocks. The other meditative asanas have a larger area of contact between the floor and the body – the weight of the body is supported partly by the buttocks and also by the legs, which reduces aches and pains developing.

Technique

Place a folded blanket or rug on the floor. Sit with the legs facing forwards in front of the body.



Fold the left leg under the right thigh. Then place the right foot under the left thigh. Hold your head, neck and spine upright in a comfortable position.

Place your hands either on your knees or in your lap.

Close your eyes.

Relax your whole body.

The arms should be relaxed and not held straight.

The back should be upright and firm, but without tension.

Note: As soon as one is able to comfortably perform any other meditative asana, *sukhasana* should be discontinued.

VAJRASANA (THUNDERBOLT OR DIAMOND POSE)

Many people find this asana a little uncomfortable at first because it is a sitting position that few people ever use. At first the ankles and knees tend to ache, but with practice this asana will become most comfortable and almost a joy to sit in. Besides being an excellent meditative asana used by Muslims and Japanese Buddhists, it is the starting pose for a large number of other asanas.

The Sanskrit word *vajra* means 'thunderbolt'. The psychic *vajra nadi* which is greatly affected by this pose, is an important energy pathway which carries nervous impulses of the genito-urinary system from the brain. It is the

same word that has given the name Vajrayana to a form of Tantric Buddhism which uses sexual union as part of its spiritual sadhana. The word has various other meanings all connected with the same subject. As such vajrasana is said to enable the practitioner to gain control over the sexual functions and direct the energy towards expanding consciousness.



Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor. Kneel on the blanket with your knees together or slightly apart. Position the feet so the big toes touch each other.

Rest your arms beside the body.

Bring the buttocks downwards onto the heels at the same time taking support with the hands on the floor.

Try to sit on your heels.

If you feel pain or discomfort in the region of your ankles and knees, push your body upwards by transferring the weight to the arms.

If you are able, let the weight of your trunk be supported on your feet without any support of the arms.

Hold your head upright and the neck and back in one straight line, but without excessive backward arching of the spine.

Place your hands on top of your legs near the knees. Relax the arms and the whole body. This is the final pose.

Advice for beginners

Beginners may find it difficult to sit on their feet without the support of the arms. A good method for loosening up the legs is to support your body weight with your arms and then slowly lower your buttocks towards the feet. Bear the discomfort for a second or so and then take support of your arms again to release the tension. Then again lower your buttocks and repeat the procedure. With practice you will find that the tension disappears and

eventually you will be able to sit on the feet for longer periods without the slightest difficulty. Remember the loosening up exercises will also help you very much to make your legs more supple and allow you to sit in vajrasana.¹

Beginners who find that their legs and feet ache after a very short time in this position should return to the kneeling position and then sit on the floor with the legs outstretched. Bend one leg, hold the ankle and vigorously shake the foot until all signs of stiffness have disappeared. Repeat with the other leg. Then again sit in vajrasana.

Benefits

Vajrasana is one of the few asanas which can be performed after taking meals, as asanas in general are strictly contraindicated after food. We actually recommend that vajrasana be practised for five or ten minutes after meals. The reason is simple: vajrasana is a very relaxing position, conducive to a calm mind and body and it stimulates the digestive processes working in the stomach.

As we have already explained, vajrasana is an excellent meditative asana and in fact is the only practical meditative asana for people who suffer from sciatica or sacral infections.

Vajrasana has one notable advantage over sukhasana: one tends to automatically hold the spine straight while doing vajrasana, whereas in sukhasana there is more of a tendency to slump forwards. For this reason vajrasana is far superior to sukhasana once it is mastered.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Samaveta Pranayama

Within us there are various forms of energy which permeate and surround our bodies. These are closely connected with our health, thinking and the way we react to the external world. Some of these energies are well known: nervous energy, chemical energy and so on. Yet there are some which are not normally perceived in the everyday life of most people. It is these subtle forms as well as the grosser forms of energy that the practices of pranayama seek to harmonize and manipulate. The method of gaining mastery over these energies (pranas) is an indirect one, control and manipulation of respiration, though the control of energy that we derive from oxygen during breathing is direct.

This subject of prana and pranayama will be fully discussed in the next lesson¹. In this topic we will describe one of the simplest practices of pranayama called samaveta pranayama.

The Sanskrit word *samaveta* means 'together'. Therefore samaveta pranayama is a practice where one breathes through both the nostrils. This might seem to be an obvious and inconsequential statement, but the practice is so named to distinguish it from other techniques of pranayama where the flow of air is directed in one nostril by physically or mentally preventing the flow in the other nostril.

SAMAVETA PRANAYAMA

Sit in a comfortable position, preferably in one of the meditative asanas². If at this stage you find these meditative asanas uncomfortable you can sit in a chair or against a wall with the feet outstretched. The essential thing is that the spine remains erect. If necessary, wrap a blanket around you if the atmosphere is cold. Close the eyes.

Start to practise yogic breathing³.

Try to make the movement of the abdomen and the chest as rhythmical as possible, so that as you inhale there is a wavelike motion from

the abdomen to the chest and as you exhale there is a wavelike motion from the chest to the abdomen. Don't strain but try to breathe as deeply as possible, expelling and inhaling the maximum amount of air.

Keep your eyes closed throughout the practice. Continue in this way for a few minutes.

Now you will begin the practice of samaveta pranayama. At the end of inhalation, hold the breath for a second or so, without straining. Then breathe out. Your breathing should be as slow as is comfortable.

Exhale as much air as possible and then inhale. Again hold the breath for a short time and then exhale. Continue in this way for as long as you have time.

Duration of retention

Over a period of weeks slowly increase the time of breath retention from a second or so to a maximum of ten seconds. Do not hold the breath for longer than is comfortable. This is important. With practice the time of breath retention will increase automatically.

Benefits

This is an excellent practice in preparing the lungs for more advanced practices of pranayama. At the time of retention the amount of oxygen taken up by the blood and the amount of carbon dioxide which is discharged by the blood into the lungs is increased. When people breathe quickly and shallowly the exchange between the circulating blood and the lungs is very small. The increased exchange during samaveta pranayama helps to revitalize the body and improve the health.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

² Topic 5 of this lesson for the first two simplest positions. For details on classical meditative asanas refer to Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2.

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

The Root Cause of Tension

In this and the previous lesson we have outlined simple but effective methods of inducing temporary states of relaxation¹. Remember, these short-term relaxation practices are essential in order to rest and revitalize the entire body and mind. During these periods of calmness and clear-mindedness we are able to take a more realistic look at life. When we are relaxed we are able to laugh at situations that only half an hour before made our blood boil; we realize that our neighbour, who only a short time before had made us extremely angry, is not such a bad person after all. When we become relaxed we can see the same situations in a new light. And this more understanding approach helps to bring about positive changes in our life. We clearly see the problems that cause us disruption and work out new ways of coming to terms with our environment. (This process occurs subconsciously providing we are conscious of the factors involved.) This helps to give us a more relaxed and understanding attitude towards life and other people. For this reason, even a few minutes conscious relaxation can help us to remould our life pattern along more effective and harmonious directions.

But this only touches the surface of the problem of tension and the inability to relax. The root cause lies in the mind. The cause lies with conflicts and fears which are embedded in the subconscious mind and whose nature we are not aware of. All we feel is the tension and emotional upsets that they cause to manifest in our lives. We experience the results, often without knowing the source of the problem. The unhappiness and tension is a certainty, but the reason is an uncertainty.

No matter what people say there is only one method of eliminating these subconscious impressions (in Sanskrit they are called *samskaras*) which make life a miserable affair for much of the time. The method is to know the mind. We have to explore our own mind

and come face to face with these subconscious mental impressions. This requires both time and effort. Most people cannot even consider exploring and knowing their own mind because first this requires physical and mental relaxation. This is necessary so that we can disentangle our awareness from the outer environment and petty problems and direct it inwards. And most people have so many problems that their awareness is completely involved in worries and outside distractions.

So it is a vicious circle: one has so many mental tensions and stresses making it impossible to explore the mind in order to remove the deeper problems which are causing many of the disturbances that prevent one exploring the mind in the first place. Is there a way out of this dilemma? Yes, there is and this is the subject we will discuss here.

It is a method that at first seems like a moralistic code or indoctrination. But it is only a means to an end. It is a means to bring about a little more permanent relaxation in a person's life, so that he can eventually start to explore the inner realm of the mind and remove the real source of tension. In a way, it is a method of giving a firm foundation for the meditation practices which we will introduce you to in this book.

It is such a very simple method, at least to explain, that many people tend to miss its significance. Of course to put it into practice is a little more difficult. It is a method where you try to consciously invalidate negative tension-creating thoughts with thoughts that are conducive to a relaxed and harmonious way of life. Let us take an example to illustrate more clearly. Try to imagine that you have been brought up to believe that all Eskimos are violent and ruthless. Because of this, every time you see an Eskimo, or a picture of an Eskimo, you will suffer some kind of emotional shock, perhaps not a great one, but there will be some kind of tension. If you can look at this

situation a little more critically however, and consciously start to develop the idea that he is a human being, not much different to yourself, then you will start to reduce the mental tension that arises every time you see an Eskimo. This of course is only an example and probably not a good one, for the problems that generally cause us disturbances are more personal in nature. Now this method will not remove the root conflict regarding Eskimos – this lies in the subconscious. But this consciously developed attitude will help you to relax more and eventually enable you to explore your mind and eventually remove the basic problem. This method needs to be applied consciously in all aspects of life. Of course it is only intellectualization and merely scratches the surface, but it is a valuable aid in allowing you to relax more and thereby lead you towards eliminating the deep subconscious impressions in the future. It is a tool, nothing more.

It is a method that has been preached by all the religions throughout the ages. When Christ, Buddha, Mohammed and various other religious leaders urged people to change their attitude to others, they showed deep insight into the basis of a happy, tension free life, the stepping stone to higher consciousness. When Christ said: "Love thy neighbour as thyself", it was not meant in a moralistic sense or only to bring about social harmony. This attitude is helpful in reducing mental tension and turmoil and so aiding our lives both mentally and spiritually. It is very practical advice. Of course on a higher level – love thy neighbour as thyself – is the state of realization that each person must come to when he has cleared out the mind and realized the unity of existence. But now we are concerned with its utilization at a lower level. The various injunctions of religions were aimed at bringing about mental relaxation and clear mindedness so that the individual would be able to become more aware and open to the infinite possibilities of life and consciousness. Relaxation is the door to health, happiness and higher consciousness.

Our mental computer

Let us discuss some aspects of the brain which are very much concerned with how we relate to our surroundings and other people, and whether we habitually become tense or relaxed. Your head is the home of the most

incredible computer in existence. It is a biocomputer of complexity beyond even our wildest dreams. It consists of an estimated ten to thirteen billion brain cells, known as neurons, and of an uncountable number of interconnections between these cells. The work of this computer is to receive, store, compare, analyze and direct all the data that we receive from the body and its surroundings via the sense organs of the ears, skin, eyes, nose, etc.

The brain has a memory of past experiences, of advice given to us by our parents, our teachers, our friends, and everyone and everything we have been in contact with and interacted with till the present day. These experiences determine how we react to different life situations. At any given moment data from the internal and external environment is sent via nerve impulses to the brain. A particular part of the brain called the limbic system compares this incoming information with previous experiences stored in the memory of the cerebral cortex. In the light of these memories, we respond to the data in a fixed, programmed manner. In other words, the response of our mind and body to life situations is determined by previous mental conditioning.

If the situations we encounter in life don't contradict our previous experiences then we suffer no emotional or mental tension. If, however, the incoming data from the surroundings does not fit the pattern of our memories then the limbic system starts to create tension. It is designed to do this so unfamiliar and possibly dangerous situations do not catch us unaware. We are programmed to become tense so that we are prepared for abnormal situations. It is a protective measure. Yet most of us are so badly conditioned that we respond to almost all of life situations as though they are a threat to our survival. We continually feel hatred, fear, anger and so on. We exist in a state of physical and mental tension.

Yet this over-emotional response to life situations is not necessary for twenty four hours a day. It is only necessary when we are faced with a real emergency. We need to change our mental programs, so that unfamiliar data from the environment does not automatically bring the limbic system into action. In this way we can begin to relax and enjoy life more.

Many over-reactions in life are due to subconscious memories carried over from

childhood: fear of strangers, of the dark, of insects, dislike of the opposite sex or of people from another country. These are part of mental conditioning and cause the limbic system to make us tense whenever we meet life situations that don't reinforce our mental conceptions. For example, if we have a fear of the dark and suddenly the brightly lit room we are sitting in is plunged into darkness, the reaction of fear in this circumstance is not necessary; it is a result of previous experiences stored in our memory. This is just an example, although similar reactions occur throughout our lives. One of the biggest complexes that modern man has is the fear of failure; the desire to be successful. Every person feels that he must be a great success or he will lose the respect of his friends, family and himself. This fear is only a programmed response; perhaps our parents and teachers continually indoctrinated us that the only worthwhile people in the world were those who 'made it'. As a result we are continually worried about failing; every situation we meet in life, every person we meet is a challenge, for they may show us up as failures. And so whatever we do in life is treated as an emergency, and we remain perpetually tense. It is only when we mix with close friends, who we know will never consider us as unsuccessful that we actually relax. This is a good example of how our mental programming governs our life and makes us unable to free ourselves and relax. Again this type of programming is not necessary – it exists only because of our faulty way of thinking and education.

The physiological ego

Man's brain is a continual hive of activity, although he is never aware of this, except for the tiny portion which reaches his conscious perception. All the sensory data is being processed in the subconscious realms of the mind. Data is being continuously received from all parts of the body and from the external environment via the sense organs and either acted upon, stored or ignored. Unawareness of all this activity is essential, for it allows one's consciousness freedom to deliberate on a limited field of interest. If a person was aware of all this subconscious activity he would be inundated and overpowered by the continual influx of millions of bits of information. What we are interested in is what decides which

particular information reaches conscious perception.

It is scientific research during the last few years that has thrown some light on this question. It has been found that a part of the brain called the reticular activating system, situated at the top of the spinal cord, performs this function. This system acts like a sluice gate allowing only a small percentage of the incoming data to the brain to reach conscious perception. How does it decide what should reach man's conscious attention and what should not? It allows information to arise to our consciousness only if the data reinforces or fits in with the pattern of mental conditioning, or if the incoming information is particularly urgent. So perception is dependent on what a person's mental state will allow him to perceive. Other incoming data which doesn't fit in the mental program remains in the subconscious realms of the mind and so a person is unaware of it. We perceive the world around us in accordance with the dictates of our present mental apparatus. For example, if you meet someone you dislike, then the information which tends to reach your awareness is that which confirms and reinforces your conditioned prejudices. If you like a person, then you tend to become aware of that information which confirms the friendship. We generally see the good points of our friends and the worst points of our enemies. Of course, if incoming sensory impulses tell us something different and are very powerful inputs, then this can overcome the programming. For example, sometimes we see bad features in our friends and good features in our enemies.

So you can see that our perception of the world depends very much on our prejudices. This is generally called the ego, especially in psychology; it is that which creates all the distinctive features of your 'self'. We are at the mercy of our programming. If mental programs have been written to see hatred around us, then we will interpret all phenomena in this light. If our program says that all people in general are friendly, then we interpret all actions by others as being friendly in nature.

Tension: the outcome of mental programming

Man's problem is that the outside world rarely reinforces the pattern of most of his mental

conditioning. The result is that the limbic system is continually creating mental and emotional stress responses. We remain unable to relax. Tension becomes a normal part of life. It is not the brain that is faulty; it is the narrow limitations of our mental program put into the brain that is the cause of the problem. The program is unsuitable for our environmental situation.

Our attitude towards life depends on our mind; an unsuitable, narrow, unrealistic, incompatible mental state leads to continual conflict with our surroundings and to unhappiness and stress as a consequence. An expansive, realistic mental program leads to harmonious interaction and good relationships with the environment and with other people, which must lead to happiness and relaxation. Our lives can either be an expression of joy or an expression of discontent; it depends on the content of the mind. Are we then completely at the mercy of our mind? Yes, we are, but at the same time we have the ability to throw out the contents of the mind that cause so much havoc in our lives. We can change our mental program or at least modify it by removing all the dross or unwanted parts. All that is required is the desire to reorientate our life along new pathways and to translate this desire into personal effort.

The eventual method is by exploring the mind, facing the inner contents and clearing out the rubbish. But before we can do this effectively we need to bring a measure of relaxation into our lives to enable us to relax sufficiently in the first place to direct our awareness inwards. The method to bring about an initial degree of relaxation is by consciously trying to rewrite our existing program.

REPROGRAMMING THE MIND

This is definitely possible, at least to a degree. The content of our mind is due to our environmental interactions since birth. Our mental programming has been written in response to the situations we have faced in life. It is continually being updated and modified in the light of new experiences. In this way it is possible to influence the direction in which our mind is being programmed by consciously developing attitudes such as the ones suggested at the end of this topic.

Of course, we can never overcome deep-seated mental impressions. These can only be removed or at least neutralized by the deeper exploration of our mind through meditation techniques. But the process of consciously developing attitudes to life is a positive step towards cleaning the whole mind, gaining relaxation and starting to live life joyously. The choice is ours: we can either take steps to make this world a veritable heaven on earth or we can remain as we are.

Codes for mental reprogramming

The codes we have formulated are not intended to be moralistic. They are a means to an end. To reiterate, they are suggestions by which you can start to consciously alter your attitude towards life's situations. They are intended to relax you sufficiently, so that you can eventually delve into your mind through meditation practices and thereby root out the deeper negative aspects of your mental nature.

These codes are not supposed to change your lifestyle, and we don't advise you to force them on yourself at all times. Only remember them as you go about your daily routine and their presence will help you from within, from your subconscious 'attitude centres'.

Code 1

Make the effort to begin to accept other people fully. Try not to see them merely as objects to be used for your own gratification. Try to accept others as also acting in accordance with their mental conditioning. What you see in them is only an external manifestation of their mental program. In this way they are no different from yourself, except their program may be a little different. You are now aware of your dependence on your mental conditioning; perhaps they don't realize it yet. If you can accept others more they in turn will start to accept you. Laugh at yourself, at your behaviour and at your antics.

Code 2

Accept yourself. Know that your actions are the result of your mental makeup. For this reason don't worry about your deficiencies and problems. Accept your limitations. But at the same time feel the need to clean the mind of its conflicts. It is our inability to accept ourselves that causes so much anguish in life.

Code 3

Watch your habituated reactions to people around you and to your environment. Watch how your attachment to the external can result in so much discontentment. Try to reduce your need to find happiness in outside things. This does not mean that you should not follow external attractions for this would result in suppression, which causes more harm than good. It means that you should carry on your life as it is now, but if you don't get what you want then accept it with a shrug of the shoulders, with a sense of detachment.

Code 4

Find out your greatest needs, attachments, desires, etc. Be as critical as you can. A good method of discovering your attachments is to trace the cause of your present anger or your present unhappiness back to its source and there you will find the emotional and mental attitude that caused the disturbance. Particularly notice how you react with people whom you distinctively dislike or don't get on with. These persons will help you to recognize and to eventually remove your emotional hangups. View the whole world and everyone in it as being your teacher.

Code 5

Try to live in the now. Don't live in the past by worrying about what has already happened or by reliving pleasurable past experiences. Don't anticipate the future. Plans can be made, but see the planning as being part of the now, not as really being for the future. Try to live each moment, each present moment as fully as possible by giving your attention to the now. In this way you will start to live life to the fullest. When you do anything, from taking a bath to eating food, or sweeping the floor to earning your living, try not to think of when it will be finished. Enjoy every action that you do at the time that you do it. Try to enjoy the fact that you exist and that an expression of your existence is in your every action.

Code 6

Don't identify yourself completely with your actions, your body or your mind. Though you are trying to change your mind, it is only part of you. It is not your consciousness – the witness that sees all events that occur in your

life. Most of us identify ourselves completely with our minds and bodies. We ignore the consciousness that lies behind everything we do. As we purify our mind and body we will begin to see and identify ourselves with this underlying consciousness.

Code 7

Try to be more open towards other people. Express your true feelings as much as possible. When we try to be what we are not, when we try to impress people and when we hide our inner feelings from others, we immediately experience mental tension and alienation. This tends to intensify our feelings of 'me against the world'. Remember also that even the most insensitive person can detect to a degree if you are trying to hide something, or if you have a guilty secret, for he might also be hiding or have hidden the same type of guilty secret.

Code 8

Remember that everyone has the potential to attain higher levels of awareness. A man's present attitude towards his environment or toward you is caused by mental programming. His present mode of living is temporary and will change and become more harmonious if and when he starts to understand himself and his mind. All of us have unrealized potential just waiting to be tapped. Try to see this potential in all people, no matter how difficult it may be.

Code 9

Don't avoid difficult situations. Normally we shape our lives so that we interact with people we dislike as little as possible. We continually try to associate ourselves with people and situations which tune in with our emotional programming. As such we continue to live in a way that reinforces and satisfies our individual prejudices. Treat difficult situations and enemies as the greatest teachers. It is they who can show us most clearly the way in which our mental program works. It is our enemies who bring to the surface our emotional conflicts and prejudices. Very few of us are really aware of programming and conditioning. When we recognize it then we can start to deal with it.

Code 10

Try to put yourself in other people's shoes. Instead of blindly reacting in ways that you are programmed, try to see the other person's point of view. For example, if a person leaves the door open you may become angry. Instead of becoming angry ask yourself why he left the door open. Perhaps he was in a hurry. Perhaps he was thinking of some other business. Perhaps it is part of his mental programming to leave doors open; maybe he was brought up in a house that did not have doors. Also it is your programming to become angry when someone leaves the door open. Remember your reaction is purely automatic. Try to change your response so that doors that are left open don't cause emotional upsets. Apply this to other situations in your life.

Notes

- ¹ Shavasana, Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
Shavasana, Part 2 – Topic 8 of this lesson.

Relaxation: Shavasana (Part 2)

In the previous lesson we explained the importance of regularly relaxing the mind and body and how relaxation techniques bring about the removal of physical and mental tension¹. We explained the importance of tensing the whole body just prior to relaxing by using *naukasana*, as well as the first part of *shavasana*.

SHAVASANA – PART 2

The two parts of *shavasana* comprise a whole and as such the second part should be practised immediately after the first part without a break.

Technique

Your body should be in the supine position which you have already assumed for part 1.

Make sure that the eyes are closed and consciously release the eye muscles. The mouth should be closed.

The teeth should not be clenched but slightly separated.

Don't press the lips together, but let them relax.

If necessary, yawn to remove facial tension.

Feel that your head is very heavy.

Now feel heaviness in the whole body. Imagine that your whole body is so heavy that it is sinking into the floor. Tell yourself that if you wanted to raise your body now you would find it impossible, because your muscles are completely limp.

Feel gravity acting on every part of your body and pulling it towards the ground.

Now watch the space or blankness in front of the closed eyes.

Imagine that this space surrounds your whole body. Your body is in the middle of that space.

Try to imagine that your body is slowly sinking in that space, slowly, slowly sinking like a leaf falling from a tree. Feel your body sinking, sinking, sinking into the depths of that infinite space.

Do this for a minute or two or longer if you have time.

If thoughts arise, let them arise.

But continue to feel the body sinking.

Now become aware of your breath. Don't change the rhythm of the breath; only become aware of the flow in and out of your nostrils.

When you breathe in, know that you are breathing in.

When you breathe out, be fully aware that you are breathing out.

Try to feel that it is the first time you have ever breathed; you are experiencing breath for the first time in your life.

As you breathe in, feel the health-giving oxygen entering your body, nourishing all the cells and giving you perfect health.

As you breathe out feel all the poisons leaving your body.

All the tensions, stresses, problems, etc. are flowing out of you via the exhaled breath.

Feel all anxieties leaving you with every breath.

Try to maintain awareness only of the breath, but if other thoughts arise, don't worry.

Merely carry on with your practice. Continue in this way for as long as you have time available.

At the end of the practice stretch your hands, your arms, stretch your feet and legs, become aware of the surroundings and slowly open your eyes.

If you have carried out the instructions without sleeping and with alertness, but without tension, then you should feel wonderfully refreshed.

Sleep

The biggest problem is sleep, unless of course you practise *shavasana* specifically to remove insomnia. It is the habit of most of us to sleep whenever we achieve a reasonable degree of relaxation. We seem to associate relaxation

with sleep and tension with wakefulness. Yet the aim of shavasana is to gain a high state of relaxation while being fully awake.

If we fall asleep half way through shavasana we lose much of the benefits, because during sleep the mind again manifests its usual patterns of worry. By remaining awake and directing awareness to the different parts of the body and the breath in the way described, our awareness is coaxed away from its entanglement with obsessive mental anxieties. So try to stay awake, even though it is very easy to just drop off to sleep.

Awareness

Throughout the practice one should try to be aware of all the processes which we have described in shavasana. However, it is very easy to think of other thoughts and become distracted from the practice in hand. You should not suppress thoughts if they arise. Let them occur, be aware of them but simultaneously continue on with shavasana.

Benefits

People who suffer from high blood pressure, neurasthenia, diabetes or any other ailment that is directly (more directly than other ailments, that is) related to excessive stress are particularly advised to practise shavasana a few times every day.

Instructions

During yoga classes the teacher gives all the necessary instructions and the practitioner merely listens and carries them out. It is far easier to gain benefits under these circumstances. However, when you practise by yourself you should develop the idea that you are the instructor. Instead of the instructor being in the form of another person, he is now in your head. Mentally repeat the instructions to yourself and then enact them. In this way you are more likely to maintain awareness throughout the practice.

Summary of the steps of shavasana

Shavasana is a systematic technique which progressively relaxes the body and mind. Therefore the order of practice is important so that you become more and more relaxed as you work through the technique. The following is a list of the basic steps:

1. Adjustment of body position on the floor
2. Experience of contact of body with the floor
3. Feeling of heaviness and limpness of different parts of the body
4. Feeling of sinking in the space in front of the closed eyes
5. Breath awareness. If you change the details of this technique to suit personal circumstances and preferences, try to maintain this basic order of steps.

Notes

- ¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

The following recommended programs are intended as a progression from Lesson 1. The student should use his discretion in omitting the least necessary practices and adding the most necessary practices to suit the time he has available. For example, if your legs are still very stiff you should continue to practise the leg loosening exercises previously described¹, as well as doing as many as possible of the practices outlined in this second lesson.

We have not included the practices of danta dhauti, neti and eye exercises in the programs because these can become part of your daily wash and bath routines. However, we recommend that they can be practised in the program chart given on page 68.

Note: The best time to practise is in the morning. However, any other time is also

suitable providing it is not after a meal. Try to practise the techniques that you think you most need in any other time that you have available.

Sukhasana and vajrasana have not been included in the practice programs. We suggest you remember to practise them in your spare time. Sitting in vajrasana for a few minutes after meals is especially beneficial as it aids the process of digestion.

Whenever you feel fatigued or tense during the day, practise naukasana and/or shavasana to relax the mind and body. Make the effort to practise your program regularly every day. This is sometimes difficult but brings the best results.

Practice	Regularity
Danta Moola Dhauti	Preferably after each meal. If not, at least once daily
Jihva Moola Dhauti	Once daily in the morning
Karna Dhauti	Once a week
Eye exercises	As necessary
Jala Neti	As necessary, but at least once every week

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Goof Ghooran	10 each way	2
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Utthanasana	10 rounds	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	3
Chakki Chalanasana	10 each way	3
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	20 times	3
Greeva Sanchalanasana	—	3
Saithalyasana	—	5
Marjari-asana	25	5
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Shavasana	full form	10
Breathing	—	10
		60
Program 2: duration ½ hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	2
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	20 times	3
Greeva Sanchalanasana	—	4
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Saithalyasana	—	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Samaveta Pranayama	—	7
Practise Shavasana when you have time or before sleeping		30
Program 3: duration ¼ hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Saithalyasana	—	3
Marjari-asana	10	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Samaveta Pranayama (in Sukhasana or Vajrasana)	—	5
		15

Notes

¹ Book 1, Lesson 1, Topic 3

Lesson 3

That which does not exist shall never be.
That which exists shall never cease to be.

—*Bhagavad Gita* (2:16)

Simha Kriya: The Lion's Yawn

This practice is also known as simhasana and simha mudra, and in the yoga upanishads as *simhagarjanasana* (roaring lion pose). We have already described methods of cleaning and revitalizing the various different organs of the head, such as the nose, eyes, etc.¹. Simha kriya supplements these previous practices by giving an excellent massage and stimulation to the organs of the throat, in particular the tonsils. These two insignificant looking guardians of the throat have a decisive role to play in maintaining good health.

The tonsils

If you open your mouth and look in a mirror you will see two masses of spongy tissue seated at the back of the mouth in front and on each side of the throat. These are called the tonsils. Similar masses are to be found at the back of the nose (called the adenoids), on the back of the tongue and also scattered over the walls of the throat. These all form part of the lymphatic system and are known as lymph nodes.

One of the functions of the lymphatic system is to eliminate toxins from the body. As such it performs an essential role, for it is in the accumulation of toxins that germs breed resulting in disease. Poisons and bacteria that are mopped up in the system are trapped and concentrated in the lymph nodes, including the tonsils, prior to expulsion from the body. This bacteria is neutralized by antibodies which are produced within the lymph nodes.

Sometimes, however, the build-up of toxins within the system becomes too great and this overwhelms the lymph nodes. Under these circumstances the nodes themselves become infected. In the case of the tonsils the result is a painful inflammation and fever known as tonsillitis.

The normal medical practice, which fortunately is losing favour, is to remove these tonsils when they start to become inflamed. This does not solve the problem because the

real reason for the inflammation is an over-toxic blood system. In fact in the long run removal causes more problems than it solves, since these small organs are vital in protecting the body against the onset of disease. Yoga approaches this ailment in a more natural manner. Through asanas and pranayama the entire body is purified of poisons and the occurrence of tonsillitis and other ailments connected with the lymphatic system become less likely.

Simha kriya in particular influences the tonsils. It stimulates the blood flow to the tonsils and thereby flushes out accumulated toxins. As such it is a powerful technique for preventing and often removing tonsillitis.



SIMHA KRIYA

Place a blanket on the floor.

Sit in vajrasana².

Separate the knees about 45 cms. The toes of both feet should be touching. Lean forwards and place the hands on the floor between the legs.

The hands should be side by side with the fingers pointing backwards.

The elbows should point backwards. Straighten the arms fully and arch the back; this is important in giving the maximum stretch to the front of the neck.

Tilt the head backwards sufficiently so that there is a comfortable amount of tension in the neck.

The eyes should be kept open during the practice, with the gaze directed at the centre of the eyebrows or at a point on the ceiling in front of you.

Keep the mouth closed. Fold the tongue backwards so that the tip presses hard against the soft palate at the top and back of the mouth. Inhale slowly and deeply through the nose.

At the end of the inhalation release the tension of the tongue, open the mouth and extend the tongue outwards and towards the chin as far as possible.

Exhale slowly. Simultaneously produce a clear, loud and steady vocal sound from the throat; in other words an *aaah* sound. If one wishes the tongue can be also moved from side to side while emitting the sound.

At the end of exhalation, again press the tongue against the upper palate of the mouth. Close the mouth and breathe in.

This is 1 round. Do as many rounds as time permits.

VARIATIONS OF SIMHA KRIYA

There are a number of variations of simha kriya. The following are the same as the basic technique except that the sitting positions are different.

Variation 1

Sit in sukhasana (the simple pose)². Simha kriya performed from this position is the simplest and most suitable for those who have difficulty sitting in vajrasana. This variation should be discarded as soon as one can sit in vajrasana without discomfort.

Variation 2

Sitting in padmasana (the lotus pose). This is a more difficult variation and will be understood more fully when we cover padmasana³.

This practice is particularly beneficial if one faces the sun so that the rays go into the back of the mouth.

Awareness and duration

Throughout the practice one should be aware of the eyebrow centre or a point on the ceiling. While inhaling also be aware of the pressure of the tongue on the palate and breathing. While exhaling also be aware of the sound and vibration produced in the throat.

For general health purposes practise up to three minutes daily. It can be practised at any time. For specific ailments increase the number of rounds.

Benefits

The tonsils depend on a good blood supply for efficient functioning. The blood often becomes congested in this region especially when one's system is particularly toxic and during tonsillitis. Simha kriya massages the throat region and squeezes out stagnant, impure blood so that it returns to the kidneys for purification. At the end of practising simha kriya, the muscles and blood vessels of the throat are relaxed. This allows a freshly oxygenated supply of blood to circulate in this region, which has a wonderful rejuvenating effect on the tonsils, helping to improve the health of the whole body as well as removing the causes of tonsillitis.

In the throat there are many other vital organs. These include the thyroid glands, the pharynx, the larynx, the salivary glands as well as the auditory system in general. All of these receive a wonderful massage in the same way as described for the tonsils. Since these provide essential functions of the body, the improvement in their health through the simple practice of simha kriya can have vast repercussions on our lives.

All nerves connecting the body to the brain must pass through the neck region. It is a vital crossroad. Also in the throat region there are various nerve plexuses which control the organs of the throat. Simha kriya stretches these nerves and removes stagnant blood, allowing an influx of fresh blood. This together with the stimulation that the nerves also receive results in better nerve connections to the brain and in turn increased efficiency in the glands and organs of the body.

Simha kriya is a useful practice for preventing and removing pharyngitis, laryngitis and general throat ailments.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁴ For details on the thyroid gland refer to Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2.

Asanas: Practice

SHASHANKASANA (POSE OF THE MOON OR HARE POSE)

The Sanskrit word *shashank* means 'moon' – hence the name of the asana. It is also commonly called the hare pose because in the final position it imitates a bounding hare.

One often wonders why it is called the moon pose for it does not appear to have any obvious connection or resemblance to the moon. However, the reason is simple. The word *shashank* is derived from the two words *shash*, which means 'hare' and *ank*, which means 'lap'. Why? Because it is said that the dark patches on a full moon resemble the shape of a hare with the moon in its lap. We leave this to the reader's imagination.

There is another reason for the name the moon pose. The moon symbolizes calmness and peace. It emits soothing vibrations, and who among us has not felt tranquillity when gazing at the moon? Shashankasana is a wonderful practice for dissolving even the most overwhelming anger.



Basic technique

Place a blanket or thin rug on the floor. Sit in *vajrasana*¹.

Place the hands on the knees and comfortably straighten the back.

Relax the whole body.

Close the eyes. Inhale and at the same time slowly raise the arms, keeping them straight.

The inhalation and movement should be slow. At the end of inhalation the arms should be vertically above the head; those who wish can

move their arms a little further behind the head accentuating the stretch of the chest.

Slowly exhale and bend forwards.

The arms, trunk and head should remain in one line.

At the end of exhalation the forehead and arms should rest on the floor in front of the knees (see picture).

Those who find this impossible should lean forward as far as is comfortable. Relax the whole body taking care that the arms are fully relaxed.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Be aware of the breath and the rhythmical pressure of the abdomen against the thighs.

Breathing in feel the abdomen rising against the thighs.

Breathing out feel the abdomen moving away from the thighs.

This is the final position. Stay in the final position for a comfortable length of time.

Then inhale and raise the trunk and arms to the vertical position.

Slowly exhale and lower the arms and return to the starting position.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale while raising the arms from the starting position. Exhale while lowering the arms and trunk to the final pose. Breathing should be deep and slow in the final position. Inhale while raising the arms and trunk. Exhale while returning to the starting position. The breath should be synchronized with the physical movements.

One should be aware throughout the practice. While moving from the starting position to the final pose and when returning to the starting position, be fully aware of the breath and movement. In the final position be aware of the breath.

Beginners should slowly increase the duration in the final pose until they can comfortably hold it for about three minutes. Those who wish to calm their anger and frayed nerves should especially increase the time spent in the final position.

Mistakes to avoid

Many people fail to keep their head, arms and trunk in one straight line when lowering themselves to the final position. If possible the arms and forehead should touch the floor at about the same time. The head, arms and trunk should also remain in one line when raising the body from the final pose. Often the arms are kept straight in the final pose. This is incorrect for it means that the body is not fully relaxed.

Benefits

Shashankasana is a reasonably simple asana yet it gives many benefits. Most people have very stiff backs. Shashankasana stretches the back muscles and separates the individual vertebrae from each other. This releases pressure on the discs that keep the vertebrae apart. Often nerve connections emanating from the spinal cord are squeezed by these discs giving rise to various forms of backache and sciatica. The separation of the discs during shashankasana helps to relieve these pains and encourage the discs to resume their correct locations. The stretch imparted to the back muscles removes sluggish and depleted blood. On completing the asana fresh blood is soaked up into the muscles in the same way that water is absorbed by a sponge. This regenerates both the back muscles and the all important spinal nerves.

The deep breathing in the final position applies a gentle yet powerful massage to the abdominal organs. As such this asana is very useful in helping to remove and prevent various abdominal disorders such as constipation and indigestion.

This asana tones the pelvic organs and is found beneficial in alleviating sexual disorders. Women will find this asana advantageous.

All of us become angry. It takes a mere second to feel anger but far longer to regain normality. Deep and slow breathing helps to calm anger. Shashankasana induces this and quickly brings about relaxation. Breath awareness accentuates this process by withdrawing our thoughts away from the cause of our anger. The by-product of emotional upsets such as anger is over-stimulation of the adrenal glands. These two glands inject adrenalin directly into the bloodstream causing overactivity of the bodily functions and stress. Shashankasana

regulates these organs, helping to bring about a relaxed mind and body.

This is a very comfortable asana. In fact it is so comfortable that we know of some people who can sleep in this pose and often do.

VARIATIONS OF SHASHANKASANA

There are other forms of shashankasana. The most useful are the following:

Variation 1

Take the same starting position as the basic technique – vajrasana.

Hold the arms behind the back and clasp the right wrist with the left hand. Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Exhale and slowly bend forwards until the forehead touches or is near the ground.

Repeat the same procedure as already described for the final position of the basic technique. After some time slowly raise the trunk while inhaling and return to the starting position.

Note: Apart from the technique all other details are essentially the same as given for the basic form of shashankasana.

Variation 2

This variation is very much the same as variation 1.

Instead of holding the arms behind the back, the fists are placed in front of the soft portion of the abdomen just below the navel.

The knuckles point towards and touch each other.

One now bends forward and performs the same technique described for variation 1.

Note: This alternative method intensifies the massage imparted to the abdominal organs in the final pose. It is particularly recommended for relieving abdominal ailments such as constipation and flatulence. Apart from this particular characteristic this variation gives all the benefits of the basic shashankasana.

Variation 3: Pranamasana (bowing pose)

Sit in vajrasana. Grasp the lower part of the calves just above the ankles with your hands. Bend forwards and place the crown of your head on the floor in front of your knees.

Your head should rest on a folded blanket.

Raise your buttocks until the thighs are as vertical as is comfortable.



BSY ©

Breathe normally with awareness.

This is the final pose.

Remain in this position for a comfortable length of time.

Note: This variation particularly directs an extra supply of blood to the brain. As such it is helpful in removing tiredness and mental fatigue and certain types of headache. People who suffer from high blood pressure or vertigo should practise with caution.

SUPTA PAWANMUKTASANA (LEG LOCK POSE)

The Sanskrit word *pawan* means 'wind' and the word *mukta* means 'release' or 'free'. Hence this is a wind releasing pose because it is very useful in removing wind or flatulence from the intestines and stomach. It is especially useful for beginners for though simple, it gives many benefits. Even the most unhealthy person can do this asana.

Technique

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your back. Relax the whole body.



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Stage 1

Bend the right leg and bring the thigh and knee as near as possible to the chest.

The other leg should remain straight.

Place the hands over the knee and interlock the fingers.

Gently pull the knee nearer the chest.

Relax the whole body keeping the straight leg, back and head on the floor.

Breathe in deeply and slowly while simultaneously raising the head and shoulders.

At the end of inhalation the forehead, nose, chin or neck should touch or be as close as

possible to the right knee.

Hold your breath for a short time in the raised pose.

Then exhale slowly and lower the head and shoulders to the floor to resume the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Inhale while again raising the body and repeating the procedure.

Do a number of rounds.

Then straighten the bent leg and relax the whole body for a short time.

Stage 2

Bend the other leg towards the chest and repeat the same procedure as given in stage 1.

Do the same number of rounds.

On completion, straighten the left leg and relax the whole body.



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Stage 3

Now fold both legs to the chest.

Repeat the same procedure as stage 1.

Afterwards relax the whole body with awareness on breath.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breath should be deep and synchronized with the movement as described in the technique. This is important for it accentuates the massage of the abdominal organs. This asana will give the most benefits if one holds the breath while in the raised position for as long as is comfortable.

One should be aware of the breath and the compression of the abdomen throughout the practice.

For general health benefits do three to five rounds of each stage. For specific ailments such as removal of wind, more rounds can be performed at one's discretion.

Sequence

This asana can be done at any time except after meals. However, it is particularly beneficial when done early in the morning before going to the latrine, for it effectively stimulates

the nervous action of the bowels and gives a good motion. It is therefore a useful method for ensuring that the abdomen is emptied as much as possible before beginning one's yoga practices.

Simpler alternatives

If you suffer from back problems, obesity or certain other ailments you may find the previous method difficult or uncomfortable. If you cannot do it then it is a great pity for it gives many benefits. For this reason we suggest a simpler alternative which gives essentially the same benefits though to a lesser degree.

All the stages are performed in the way already explained, except that the head and shoulders are not raised off the ground. Instead, breathe slowly and deeply with the legs bent to the chest. Hold this position for as long as comfortable, performing each stage in turn. Once this simple procedure is mastered you should progress to the original technique previously explained.

Benefits

This asana gives an excellent massage to the abdomen. In this pose the abdominal muscles are tensed and simultaneously the internal organs are compressed by the folded legs. This increases the circulation of the blood and stimulates the nerves which connect the organs to the brain or nerve complexes. As such it helps in no small way to relieve various types of abdominal ailments associated with malfunctioning of inefficient organs.

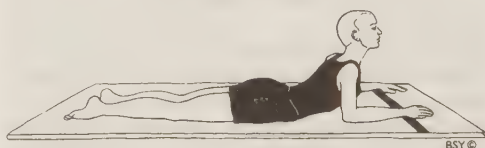
This asana is particularly useful for removing constipation and flatulence. Food moves from the stomach through the intestines during digestion. The intestinal tract is divided into two sections, the small and the large intestines. Most of the digestive processes occur in the small intestine. After this the waste matter proceeds to the large intestine (colon). The large intestine is about five feet in length and rises upwards on the right side of the body (ascending colon), crosses horizontally in the region of the navel (transverse colon) and then goes downwards on the left side of the body (descending colon). It terminates in the anus. For this reason it is important that *supta pawanmuktasana* is first performed with the right leg bent so that waste matter is encouraged to pass in the proper direction

and more easily to the anus for expulsion, from the ascending colon to the descending colon. If the left leg is bent first the massage and stimulation of the bowels will be in the opposite order to the movement of faeces and wind. This is an important aspect and needs to be done correctly to gain maximum benefits.

This asana also tones up the back muscles and spinal nerves.

SPHINX ASANA

In English this asana is known as the sphinx pose because the front of the body in the final pose very much resembles an Egyptian sphinx. It is also known as *ardha bhujangasana*, the half cobra pose. It is a simple asana and is a preparatory pose for *bhujangasana* (the cobra pose), which will be fully described in the next lesson².



Technique

Lie flat on the floor, face downwards. Extend the feet so that the heels and soles face upwards. Rest the forehead on the ground. Bend the arms and place the forearms flat on the floor. Place the palms downwards on each side of the head with the fingertips in line with the crown of the head. Relax the whole body, especially the back and leg muscles. Breathe out deeply. Then while inhaling slowly raise the head and shoulders by bringing the upper arms to the vertical position. The elbows should remain on the ground. Perform the movement by using the arms only; keep the back muscles relaxed throughout the practice. Remain in the final pose for a comfortable length of time breathing slowly and deeply. Be aware of the breath and the relaxation of the back muscles. Then breathe out while lowering the body. Relax the whole body. Then repeat the movement.

Awareness and duration

The awareness should follow the breath and relaxation of the back muscles. Do the asana according to available time. About three or four minutes is sufficient.

Benefits

This is an especially good asana for those who have a particularly stiff back. It is a good preparation for bhujangasana which requires more flexibility of the back. The benefits are the same as for bhujangasana though on a lesser scale².

MAKARASANA (CROCODILE POSE)

This asana is very similar to the sphinx asana. It is an asana that many people do naturally. We think it is worthwhile mentioning because it is so beneficial for those who suffer from slipped discs or other spinal disorders, as well as asthma and other lung ailments.

Technique

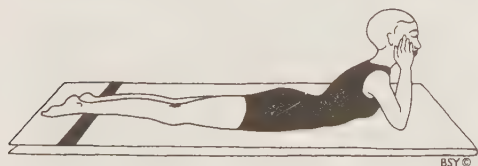
Lie flat on the stomach with the head and shoulders raised off the ground.

The head is cupped in the palms with the elbows resting on the ground.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes.

Be aware of the natural and rhythmic breathing pattern.

If you like you can also count the breath.



Benefits

If you suffer from any spinal or lung ailments we suggest you lie in makarasana for as long as possible; the longer the better. You can even read a book in this asana. This position encourages the spine to resume its normal shape and releases compression of the spinal nerves (sciatica). The chest is also expanded allowing an increased amount of air to enter the lungs, which is a great help in alleviating congestion and other ailments of the respiratory system.

This asana can also be used as a simple meditation pose by those persons who find sitting asanas impossible.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 4; Topic 2

Prana: An Introduction

There are many misconceptions about prana and pranayama. *Prana* does not specifically mean air or breath, though many people interpret the word in this way. The word *pranayama* has far wider implications than the usual definition – ‘breath control’. It is important to understand these terms, even on an intellectual level, so one knows exactly what is the purpose of pranayama.

Religious and traditional aspects

In the ancient scripture called the *Satapatha Brahmana* it is written: “Prana is the body of the Self (supreme consciousness).” In other words, prana is the vehicle or the medium of consciousness. In this sense prana can be equated with the Hindu concept of prakriti, meaning the manifest constituents of the universe in the form of matter and energy. From modern science we know that matter is really no more than an expression of energy. As such we can say that prana means energy. This prana or energy, whether it is the mind, body, matter or any form of energy, acts as the medium for carrying consciousness. Without prana, consciousness would be totally unable to express itself in the phenomenal world to manifest myriads of life forms in the universe. Prana is the active aspect of existence and consciousness is the all-pervading, inactive and witnessing principle. For life to exist both must be present.

In other scriptural texts of India there are various other definitions, but all of them point to basically the same concept. In the *Chhandogya Upanishad* prana is said to be the internal matrix, and *vayu* (loosely defined as air but actually also meaning life force, energy, wind), the external matrix of energy. In this context we see this as merely a division of the same energy, the prana here being designated as that energy which lies within the body and makes up the mind-body complex at its various levels of subtlety. It is this aspect with which

we are interested during the practice of pranayama.

In tantric and various other scriptures, energy or prana is symbolized by the all powerful divine mother Shakti or Kali and various other goddesses. It is regarded as the feminine aspect of existence, the fertile ground on which consciousness (represented by various gods, notably Shiva) can take root, grow and manifest in the universe. Shakti or prana is the womb of existence. The main theme of tantra is the unification of Shiva and Shakti so that consciousness can express itself perfectly through the medium of energy, prana. Shiva is the sight and Shakti is the eye; Shiva is the hearing and Shakti is the ears. Prana and its control is integral in all these systems, but it is known by different names.

Was the concept of prana known by other cultures and religions? The answer is emphatically yes, for the principle is not manmade; it is a basic aspect of existence. And so it should not surprise us that it is widely mentioned in the various cultures and religions of the world. Let us consider a few examples.

In Christianity much significance is given to the wine and bread served during Holy Communion. There is a great symbolical meaning behind this ceremony though few people realize it. Bread is the bread of life and that is exactly what it symbolizes – energy, prana or the life principle of the universe. Wine symbolizes spiritual enlightenment, the intoxicating bliss of all knowing consciousness. This is why these two items are taken and eaten in the ceremony: their combination represents the unity of the two aspects of existence, namely the union of consciousness with energy.

There are large numbers of other references to prana in the *Bible*. For example, in Corinthians (10:17) it is said: “For we being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread.” Bread here does not mean prana or energy, but means con-

sciousness. In other words the passage can be read as follows: "For we being many (humans) are really one consciousness and one body (of prana or universal energy), for we are all partakers of that one consciousness." This clearly shows the agreement between yogic, Christian and ancient Indian concepts.

In ancient China the concept of universal energy was prevalent. Instead of prana they called it *ki*. Like yogic thought, they had a very high and unitive understanding of man and his relationship with the universe. They considered that the whole universe is permeated with energy and that each of us being intimately linked to the universe is a powerhouse of energy. According to the Chinese, the universal energy is comprised of two continually and mutually interacting principles called yin and yang. These create matter and all its transmutations as well as manipulate all the various forms of energy. The manifested universe was seen as a harmonious whole and subject to change through the ceaseless interplay of the complementary and eternally changing yin and yang. Yin and yang can be considered as the negative and positive forces, the two poles of the manifested whole. The energy or prana of the universe is symbolized by a diagram (in yoga we would say a yantra or mandala) in which the yin and yang aspects are depicted as forming the two interdependent and interlocking parts of the whole, each containing within itself the germ or potential of the other. These principles are encompassed or held together by the Tao – Consciousness.

Be careful not to consider this as mere theory. This very concept is used in the system of acupuncture, which was practised in China thousands of years ago and continued in present day China. The success of this system of curing diseases depends on the concept of yin and yang. If the yin and yang principles did not have some approximation to the actual situation regarding energy in the universe and in the human body then acupuncture would be incapable of achieving the good results that it does. Even modern materialistic China has had to accept the ancient theory to explain the practical results that they obtain in millions of patients, with a wide variety of diseases.

Throughout history there has been a wide acceptance of the universal energy, prana. Modern science has also postulated that the

basic substance of the infinite cosmos around us is energy. In this respect science, yoga and other ancient systems have agreed with each other. It is the nature of prana in the body that has caused disagreement between traditional thought and science; though in very recent research, science is again confirming experimentally what the yogis and ancient sages knew intuitively, namely that the physical body is enveloped and controlled by an energy or pranic body.

The pranic body

Let us first of all discuss what yoga says about prana in relation to the human body. The sciences of yoga and physiology agree that there are various energies within the body: nervous energy, heat, biochemical energy, etc., which function in the different parts of the body. These energies allow all the different organs, nerves and muscles to operate and communicate with the brain. Without them the physical body and brain would not function. These energies can be classified as various forms of prana. Physiology confines itself to the study of these energies and their inter-relationship with each other. Yoga, on the other hand, says that there are other forms of prana within and around the body, as well as the energies known and accepted by physiology. These other forms of prana have a great influence on our lives.

Yoga says that permeating and surrounding the physical body is an energy body which is known as the *pranamaya kosha*, literally the sheath of prana. This corresponds to the etheric body described by people who awaken their psychic abilities. Within this pranic body, the prana flows in fixed pathways. These are called *nadis* in yogic terminology. Many people regard these nadis as nothing more than nerves (and often blood vessels) of the physical body. This is certainly not what is meant by nadis. Though of course the nerves and blood vessels are passages for energy flow, the nadis refer to pathways or flow of a particular form of prana, more subtle than the energies normally considered by physiologists. This is not just an interesting hypothesis, for Russian scientists have recently photographed these nadis as well as the flow of prana.

Let us take the analogy of a radio. A radio is made up of different parts which perform

specific functions. The human body is comprised of different organs which also carry out certain duties. In both cases, of the human body and the radio, the totality or grouping of these different parts constitutes the whole. Now consider a person who has never seen a radio before. If he was told before turning it on that the radio picks up programs from a transmitting station one hundred miles away and emits exactly the same sound he would probably laugh with disbelief. "How is this possible?" he would think. "If there is no visible connection such as a wire between the transmitting station and the radio, how is it possible for the radio to reproduce programs?" But we all know through science and by actually turning on a radio that in fact no visible connection is necessary, the connection is made in a non-visible form through the agency of electromagnetic waves. The body is like a radio, it receives energy or prana from the surroundings. When the body is healthy and the nadis allow free flow of prana it is like a well-tuned radio; it picks up with perfect clarity the energies around us. An unhealthy body is like an old, dilapidated radio; it does not tune in as well as it should to the surrounding energies. This is the aim of pranayama: to tune the body and mind to a high state of sensitivity, so that one picks up these cosmic energies and so that consciousness can shine through our mind and body in its pristine glory.

Modern science and prana

Knowledge of prana is not a new thing to scientific circles. It has been known and recorded by scientifically inclined persons throughout the ages. Unfortunately their discoveries have generally been shunned and ridiculed and their ideas not taken seriously. For example, Mesmer, who was one of the people who introduced modern man to hypnotism, called the psychic field enveloping the physical body animal magnetism. Reichenbach, an eminent industrialist and inventor of creosote did a lot of research on this subject and named the energy odic force after the Norse god Odin. Paracelsus, Keely, Eeman, Van Helmont, etc. are all down to earth non-mystical people, who have reported the existence of this pranic body. Yet no one took much notice of them, so busy were they in pursuing more concrete studies of science and technology.

Even when a renowned professor of neuro-anatomy at Yale University in America, called Dr. Harold Burr, announced the existence of this energy sheath in 1935 little notice was taken. He established that all humans, all animals, all plants, in fact all organic matter, all life, is enveloped by an energy or pranic body. He clearly stated that this pranic body, though he called it an electrodynamic field, regulates the functions of the physical form, controls growth, shape and decay of the cells, tissues and organs. Further studies in the same university showed that there was an intimate link between the mind and this pranic body. Disturbances of the mind interfered with the pranic body. Yet still no serious attention was given to this phenomenon. People preferred to bury their heads in the sand.

It is only fairly recently in Russia, Czechoslovakia and a few other countries that serious investigations on this subject have been started. And their findings sound more mystical than scientific. It is almost as though the scientists involved had been transformed into mystics, and in a way they have.

The most astounding and revealing investigation into the phenomenon of the energy body was initiated some time ago. This paved the way for the research that is now being conducted in various quarters. It opened the normally closed eyes and minds of some scientists to new possibilities. Without this initial path-finding research there would still be an atmosphere of disbelief surrounding the subject of the energy body. The research was not carried out in universities or by scientists, but by an ingenious technician in his own house, aided by his wife. His name was Kirlian and he lived in the city of Krasnodar near the Black Sea.

In his research, Kirlian gave conclusive proof of the energy or pranic body. Many people will not believe anything unless they can see it. And this is exactly what the Kirlians did; they provided photographs of the pranic body. Moreover, they were able to produce photographs of the pranic body for anyone who cared to visit them. This photograph was not the result of some fluke of nature. The pranic body of all organic objects could be photographed at any time as required.

They used equipment in which organic objects were placed in a high frequency electric

field. For this reason the technique is known as 'Kirlian high frequency photography'. The system uses an oscillator which can emit up to 200,000 electrical impulses every second. This electrical oscillator is connected to an assortment of instruments including photographic and optical equipment, together with two plates which create a high frequency electric field in the space between them. An object to be photographed is placed between the two plates. The object can be anything animate, such as a leaf, a flower, or any part of an animal or human organism. What happens when an object is photographed under these circumstances? Strange and complex patterns of light are seen to pervade and are emitted from the object. The object is seen to vibrate with life. Processes, movements, signals, flares and beautiful iridescent colours throb throughout the whole object. Untold beauty is seen to exist within organic objects about which we were previously totally ignorant. We are normally incapable of comprehending this pulsating, living phenomenon occurring within and around us.

The human hand was seen to appear like a firework display, with lights of all colours bursting into activity, some fading quickly away and others remaining in their glory for longer periods of time. In some areas of the hand there was intense activity, while in other areas there was almost lethargy in comparison. The lights, the movements and the different areas of activity seem to bear no relationship whatsoever with the different physical aspects of the hand. There was some kind of order in the multifarious show, but it was not linked to any known physiological process.

What did the scientists conclude? They decided that they were seeing a new form of energy. It is not electrical in nature; it is not magnetic nor is it heat energy. It defied classification into the normal, known forms of energy. Eventually, the scientists came to the conclusion that this phenomenon was related to the biological aspect of nature. They called it bioplasmic energy. The bioluminescence which was given off by this energy was the manifestations of ionized atomic particles. But the phenomenon was not a haphazard inner process that one would normally associate with the emission of atomic particles. The photographs showed that there were definite

patterns and structures which suggested order and unity in the organism.

There were further surprising facts to be discovered. The bioluminescence is a sure indication of the state of health of the organism. In fact the energy body indicates that a disease will occur before it actually happens. Each organism, whether plant, animal or human has a characteristic pattern when it is in a healthy condition. When the organism is unhealthy the pattern changes. This was discovered one day when the Kirlians were presented with two physically identical leaves and asked to photograph them. This they did and were surprised to discover that the patterns were different. This contradicted previous extensive experiments. Then the person who presented them with the leaves told them that one of the leaves was infected. They tried this experiment with various other diseased objects, including the human body, and found the same thing: the energy body differed to that of the same organism when in a healthy state.

The pattern of the energy body is a definite indicator of illnesses that are to come in the physical realm. It was concluded from their discoveries that a disease is manifested in the bioplasmic body long before it is in the physical body. What happens in the physical body seems to be determined by the energy body. The energy body is intimately tied up with the material body and directs its activities on a physiological level. Though this contradicts modern physiology and thereby modern medical practice, it offers vast prospects for correct diagnosis of diseases. It offers the possibility of foretelling that a disease will occur before it does and therefore will allow preventative measures to be taken.

Actually, in the future, it seems probable that we will revert to the old system of curing disease which was practised in ancient China. The system was such that a doctor received payment from his patients as long as they contracted no illness. As soon as they were stricken with a disease the doctor was obliged to start paying his ailing patient. The doctor's duty was to prevent illnesses, not specifically to cure them or patch them up as is modern medical practice. A good doctor was a person who prevented the onset of diseases. The doctors were able to give this guarantee to

patients because of their intimate knowledge and understanding of these psychic or pranic energies. This discovery of something that was widely known thousands of years ago opens up new possibilities for the relationship between the doctor and his patients.

It was also discovered that the bioplasmic body of animals and humans is very much influenced by the state of mind. This is something that is well known in yoga, and of course the converse is also true, that change in the bioplasmic or pranic body brings about corresponding changes in the mind. This is the main reason why the pranic flow is manipulated in the yogic practices of pranayama to bring about positive changes in the mind.

Kirlian photography showed that mental or emotional stress tends to blur the bioluminescence surrounding the human and animal body or any part of it that was photographed. The inner movements and flashing luminescence seemed chaotic; it certainly lacked the order that could normally be detected. This tension, of course, has negative repercussions on the physical body. This is scientific confirmation of one of the basic tenets of yoga – that the way we think has vast influence on our physical body. Our emotions and thoughts, mental problems and fatigue are reflected in the physical body via the pranic body as well as the nervous system. A relaxed emotional and mental approach to life allows the pranic body to remain in balance and consequently the physical body to remain in the best possible health. As a slight digression, it is worthwhile pointing out that this close relationship between the physical and pranic bodies and the mind is the reason why pranayama practices are so effective in bringing about vibrant health of one's whole being. Pranayama brings the physical and pranic bodies into harmony. Pranayama gives many benefits that are not easily explainable in physiological terms. This is because the influence is applied through the pranic body which is not even included in physiological terminology.

The research of the Kirlans brought many other curious results. Scientists were shocked to find that if a part of the physical organ under test was removed it still retained its bioplasmic body. In other words, if a small part of a leaf was torn the energy body was not affected. The

same applied to humans who lost a leg or an arm or any limb; though the physical form had gone, the bioplasmic body still retained its shape. We will not dwell on the implications of this revelation.

Researchers have found that the bioplasmic body gives off its own electromagnetic field which can be detected and measured by sensitive instruments. It has been found that this field changes according to the mood of the individual. We are all highly sensitive to fear, friendliness, aggression, etc. in other people. We generally feel this on a subconscious rather than on a conscious level. If a group of people are relaxed and harmonious it gives off a different electromagnetic pattern to that which can be detected if there is tension within the group. If another person enters the group then again the electromagnetic field changes. The good or bad health of individuals also influences the pattern, which indicates just how sensitive we are to bad health in others.

This electromagnetic field is also influenced by other fields such as those emitted from machinery and vibrations that we receive from the sun, moon and other cosmic bodies. The last factor ties in with the age old contention of astrologers that our lives are influenced by the heavenly bodies. Occurrences such as solar magnetic storms and eruptions of distant stars cause disturbances throughout the whole universe. They also interact with our bioplasmic body and in turn our mind and physical body.

While on the subject it is interesting to note that researchers in Canada have artificially created energy waves which cause different responses in individuals or groups of people. These waves or vibrations interfere and interact with the electromagnetic field of the bioplasmic body. They have managed artificially to produce waves that an extremely anxious person would emit. These have drastically and quickly changed the mood of groups of people when subjected to them. The whole group tended to become depressed. Waves that induce calmness have also been artificially created.

The Soviet scientists made a most important discovery that has vast implications with regard to the practice of pranayama and its influence on the pranic or bioplasmic body. As we will shortly explain, pranayama practices seek to

affect pranic flow by controlling the flow of breath. How can there be any connection? How can manipulation of the breathing have repercussions on the pranic body? According to various eminent scientists in Russia, the energy body requires continual replenishment. This is obtained from the air that we breathe. The oxygen in the air breathed gives up some of its surplus supply of free electrons and quantum energy to the bioplasmic body. This is not merely a hypothesis – scientists have actually seen this process in action. This is why correct breathing is so vital for our health. Not only does the breath maintain the health of the physical body as is known in traditional scientific circles; it also revitalizes and is the source of sustenance to our subtle bioplasmic or pranic body. This further confirms the knowledge of ancient yogis who regarded pranayama as an important part of life. The yogis knew intuitively of the existence of the pranic body. This further shows prana, and its control by pranayama, is more than a convenient and fanciful idea.

This bioplasmic body is definitely linked with life. Both animate and inanimate objects have been photographed by the Kirlian process and they have clearly shown distinctive differences. Inanimate objects are also permeated with energy or prana, but the luminescence is of a constant intensity. It lacks the iridescence, movement and life that can be clearly seen in animate objects. What happens when something dies? This was also investigated. It was found that as life slowly oozed out of the organism the intensity and orderliness of the bioplasmic body slowly reduced. Blobs of energy were seen to be ejected out of the bioplasmic body and away into the surroundings. Eventually the bioluminescence disappeared completely. This seemed to be the stage when the organism was truly lifeless. This is the reason why this energy has been widely known as vital energy or life force.

Uses of pranic control

Pranic healing is a power that one can develop through higher yoga practices and it has been used by many great saints and mediums throughout the ages. Most people tend to regard the phenomenon with a hint of scepticism, but scientists doing research on the bioplasmic body are starting to give scien-

tific validity to the system of healing. They have photographed the hands of a psychic or pranic healer while actually 'laying on hands'. It was clearly seen that an intense beam of bioluminescence poured from the hands of the healer to the patient. It seems that the healer recharges the bioplasmic body of a sick person and in this way brings about a cure. This is a further verification of something that has been surrounded by an aura of superstition.

Acupuncture has also been scientifically investigated with very conclusive results. Medical scientists were always completely mystified when they saw the wonderful results that the ancient system of acupuncture could give. It did not fit the patterns of thought associated with physiology and the highly developed scientific theories of the modern world. Yet the results were there to be seen.

The ancient Chinese, unlike modern medical practitioners, did not treat the human body as a collection of separate physical organs. They saw the whole body as a unit and that each part of the body was intimately related to the whole. We have already mentioned that the Chinese of antiquity knew of the pranic body. Not only this, they actually mapped out specific pathways of pranic flow within the physical body. Further, they were aware of seven hundred or so particular points on the skin which corresponded to the position of this flow which cannot normally be detected. It is within but not of the physical body. Needles could be inserted at these specific acupuncture points to somehow manipulate the pranic flow. If there is imbalance in the flow of prana then disease will result. These needles were able to correct the balance of prana in the pranic body and thereby cure or prevent the occurrence of illnesses.

Modern researchers have started to solve this enigma. Using Kirlian photography they have clearly seen that the flow of bioluminescence corresponds exactly to the flow patterns mapped out by the Chinese thousands of years ago. Though modern scientists use complex instruments and the Chinese used intuition, the findings are the same. The points on the skin that are used by acupuncturists to insert their needles were found to correspond precisely with notably brilliant and localized flashes of bioluminescence. In the future, collaboration between science and acupun-

cture should be able to elevate the diagnosis and removal of illness to a high level of perfection.

Svara yoga is an ancient and little known science. It relates the phases of the moon, the sun, the prevailing conditions of nature, one's breathing pattern, etc. with events that are likely to occur to an individual. For instance, it can foretell if a person will meet success in any future undertaking. The modern discoveries of science have given some indication of how this system of swara yoga works. Man is not isolated from the universe as is commonly felt. Man is linked to the whole universe via the pranic body. As such, external events such as the movement of the stars, weather, interaction with other people, vibrations from other persons as well as one's own internal makeup, mood and health intimately relate to each other. Man is an integral part of the cosmos. Yoga has always said this and now modern science is slowly but surely confirming this fact. Swara yoga, though a complex subject, has much to offer to modern man.

Telepathy and other psychic phenomena are now being investigated scientifically. It has been found that the receiving medium of telepathic messages is the bioplasmic or pranic body. This acts as a relay station which transmits the message to conscious perception. Scientists have actually detected changes in the pranic body as it receives telepathic messages. It is something that we all have the potential to do, but are not able to because of insensitivity in our mind and body. As one becomes more aware so the ability to consciously perceive telepathic messages and to use other psychic powers is increased.

Another interesting discovery made in Russia is that artificial stimulation of specific points that influence the pranic body can induce greater sensitivity to telepathic and other psychic phenomena. These points or specific areas of the body which can artificially stimulate the pranic body are known as chakras in yoga. In yoga we normally consider half a dozen or so important chakras, but there are others throughout the body. In various practices such as kundalini yoga and kriya yoga these chakras are physically and mentally stimulated. This brings about higher awareness as does artificial stimulation of the chakras with electricity and massage as practised by the scientists.

Summary

We have spent a long time discussing scientific discoveries and investigations into the pranic body. We have done this so that the reader can realize that prana is not just an imaginary concept. It is verifiable and has been confirmed by modern science. Yoga uses this pranic body and the flow of prana to bring about changes in the sensitivity of the practitioner and to influence the mind. This is done through the various practices of pranayama. Beginners often seem to be sceptical, and if they do pranayama it is because they see tangible results through knowing that they are alternating the breathing, and thereby inducing more oxygen into the physical body and eliminating more carbon dioxide. Of course this is true and this alone brings wonderful results. Yet we want you to appreciate that pranayama has a far greater implication than one normally considers.

People of today tend to listen to the words of science. As such we have given a lengthy discussion to show that modern science has shown conclusive evidence of the pranic or bioplasmic body as it is known in scientific circles.

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 1)

The Sanskrit word *nadi* means 'psychic passage' or 'specific pathway' through which prana flows throughout the body'. The word *shodhana* means 'purification'. Thus this is a practice whereby the pranic pathways are purified and decongested. This allows the prana to flow freely throughout the body, bringing the physical body into the best possible health and calming the mind. It is an excellent preparation for meditation techniques.

There are four basic stages of nadi shodhana. Each stage should be mastered before proceeding to the next. This is important, for control over the respiratory system has to be gradually developed over a period of time. Premature attempts at doing more advanced stages could lead to strain and injury of the respiratory system, and particularly to the very sensitive associated nervous system. It is for this reason that the four stages will be introduced in this book over a number of lessons. This will allow the reader to practise each stage for a reasonable period of time and to be fully ready for the more advanced stages as they are introduced.

In this topic we will discuss nadi shodhana stage 1, which is divided into two parts.

NASAGRA MUDRA (NOSE TIP POSITION)

The breath through the nostrils is controlled by the fingers of one hand held in front of the face. This position of the hand is actually called *nasagra* or *nasikagra mudra* (nose mudra). This is the first mudra that we have so far mentioned and is one of the numerous hand mudras. We don't want to discuss mudras at this stage for we will do this in the near future, but we have prematurely introduced you to nasagra mudra because it is so important for pranayama practices.



Technique

The position of the fingers and hand is as follows:

Hold the right hand in front of the face (the left hand can also be used in which case the following instructions are reversed).

Place the tips of the second (index) and third fingers so that they rest on the forehead at the eyebrow centre.

These fingers should be straight. In this position the thumb should be beside the right nostril and the fourth (ring) finger beside the left nostril. The little finger is not used.

The right nostril can now be left open or closed by pressing the side of the nose with the thumb as required. This allows air to flow, or prevents the flow.

The air flow through the left nostril can be similarly controlled with the ring finger.

The elbow of the right arm should preferably be in front of and as near the chest as possible. The forearm should be as vertical as possible. This will reduce the tendency of the raised arm to become tired after some time.

The head and back should be held upright but without strain.

NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION)

Stage 1

Sit in a comfortable position. The two simple meditative asanas, sukhasana and vajrasana are particularly suitable². If you cannot

manage these positions you can sit in a chair with a straight back or you can sit on the floor with legs outstretched and back supported against a wall.

If necessary wrap a blanket around you for warmth and to keep any insects away. Adjust yourself so that there will be no need to move for at least 10 minutes or even longer for those who have the time.

Relax your whole body.

Hold the spine upright but without arching backwards and thereby tensing the back muscles.

Place the left hand on the left knee or in the lap.

Raise the right hand and perform nasagra mudra.

Close the eyes.

For a minute or two be aware of the breath and the body.

This will help you to relax and to make the forthcoming practice easier to perform.

If you are tense or excited any form of pranayama is more difficult.

Part 1

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Slowly inhale and exhale through the left nostril.

Be aware of the breath. Do this for half the time allocated for the practice.

Then close the left nostril and open the right.

Repeat the same procedure with awareness.

Do this for about 1 week.

Then proceed to part 2.

Part 2

This is the same as part 1 except that one now starts to control the relative duration of inhalation and exhalation. Close the right nostril and breathe through the left nostril.

Simultaneously mentally count: 1, 2, 3, each interval being about 1 second. Don't strain but breathe deeply in the manner previously described – yogic breathing³.

During exhalation again keep the count mentally.

Try to make the length of exhalation twice as long as inhalation. For example, if you breathe in for a count of 4 then try to breathe out for a count of 8. If you breathe in for 3 then breathe out for 6, etc. But we emphasize: don't strain or make the duration longer than is comfortable.

1 inhalation and 1 exhalation represents 1 round.

Do 10 rounds through the left nostril. Then close the left nostril using the fourth finger, open the right by releasing the pressure of the thumb, and do 10 rounds through the right nostril.

Be aware of the breath and the mental counting throughout the entire practice. Then if you have time do 10 more rounds first through the left nostril and then 10 rounds through the right nostril.

Continue in this way for as long as you have time available.

Practise part 2 for about 2 weeks or however long it takes to master the technique, and then begin to practise stage 2, which will be explained in the next lesson⁴.

Make sure the nose is unblocked before starting the practice. If necessary do jala neti⁵.

Awareness and duration

It is easy to think of other things during the practice. The mind starts to dwell on business or breakfast and so many other diversions that have not the slightest relevance to the practice in hand. Don't become frustrated for this will cause mental stress. Only try to be aware of any wandering tendency of the mind. If it wanders let it wander, but ask yourself the question: "Why am I thinking of other things?" This will automatically encourage the awareness to return to the practice of nadi shodhana. Try to be as aware as possible of the breath and the mental counting.

One can practise this technique for any length of time. We recommend at least ten minutes daily.

Sequence and time of practice

Nadi shodhana should be done after asanas and before meditation or relaxation practices. It is best done in the morning before breakfast, though it can also be performed at other times during the day. However, it should not be done after meals.

Under no circumstances should one force the breathing. Avoid breathing through the mouth.

Benefits

Stage 1 of nadi shodhana is an excellent preparatory technique for more advanced

forms of pranayama and an excellent prelude to meditation or relaxation techniques.

It induces calmness of mind by regulating the flow of prana in the body. It helps to remove congestion or blockage of the nadis and thereby allows the free flow of prana.

The whole body is nourished with an extra supply of oxygen and the carbon dioxide is more efficiently eliminated. This purifies the whole blood system and increases the overall health of the body, including its power to resist disease. The deep, slow breathing encourages the removal of stagnant air from the lungs.

Notes

¹ Topic 3 of this lesson

² Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

⁴ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5

⁵ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Awareness: An Introduction

We have already mentioned the word awareness in the practices previously described. In this topic we will discuss its meaning and implications a little more fully, for it lies at the very basis of yoga and yogic techniques. It is essential to understand what we mean by awareness in order to gain the maximum benefits from the contents of this book. This is the biggest problem for beginners; they are told to be aware but they are not really sure what it means or what the point of it is. As such they miss the essence of their yoga practices. For this reason we will attempt to explain what is meant by awareness so that you can realize what we are aiming at, even if it is only at an intellectual level. Intellectual understanding of awareness is at least better than no understanding. Eventually, as you progress in your practices, you will come to know the meaning of awareness, not through words but by personal experience.

For most people, awareness means mere knowledge. We often say, "I am aware of that," meaning that we know something. In yoga it also means knowledge but it simultaneously means far more. Awareness in a general sense means to comprehend, to know, to feel what is happening around us. It also means to know what is happening within us. Most people comprehend very little of what is occurring around and within them. This is a low state of awareness. As we realize and relate to more things internally as well as externally, and see the underlying unity in everything, we naturally develop more awareness. As this happens we break down the barriers and limitations of the mind. We understand more aspects and gain insight into the many realms of existence.

Before we further expound on the meaning of the word awareness let us first briefly mention consciousness. Every life form is a vehicle of consciousness. Whether it is a cell, a plant, an animal or a human, the underlying

nature of all living organisms is consciousness. However, each of these forms express the potential of consciousness at different levels. The cells and plants express consciousness at a very rudimentary level, while man expresses it at a far more complex level. The consciousness is the same – the potential for manifestation is different. Plants have feelings (as has been scientifically proved by various people) but no mobility. Animals have both feelings and mobility. Man also has these, but at the same time he has an extra attribute – awareness. Man has the extra and all important ability to be able to know his consciousness and to allow it to manifest and blossom to its fullest potential. The consciousness does not change. It is the expression that becomes expanded. Man can increase his awareness and transcend limitations (or rather limitations that most of us see and think to be fixed) and realize higher potentialities of consciousness. An animal, as far as we know, is unable to be aware because of its very nature. It contains the potential but it is totally unable to see the potential because of the very way it is made. It lacks the necessary equipment. Let us make an analogy. The atmosphere around us is pervaded by electromagnetic waves carrying programs transmitted from a large number of radio stations. Yet, can we pick them up directly? Can a stone or a tree listen directly to the symphony being broadcasted? No, this is impossible. Our body, the stone and the tree lack the necessary equipment. The waves are there but we cannot tune into them. The potential is there but we cannot use it. We are limited by our structure. Yet a radio can pick up the waves and enable us to listen to the symphony. The radio has the necessary equipment to manifest this potential contained within the atmosphere around us. It is the same with consciousness but in a much deeper and ineffable sense. It is within all life forms. Yet it is only humans (let us forget for the moment extra-terrestrial life) that have

the ability to know this consciousness. It is said that consciousness sleeps in stones, dreams in plants, begins to awaken in animals and can be fully realized in man; man can know that he is awake.

Let us be more specific and define what we mean by awareness in yoga. Awareness is the ability to stand back and to observe one's mental and physical activities. If a man is aware then he becomes a spectator of his activities both internally and externally. Those who have never experienced this will not really understand, but those who have experienced it, even for a few seconds, will know what we are trying to say. Its implications are profound. If you are able to watch what your body and mind do, then this means that your nature transcends the body and mind. It means that there is something that is able to watch what is occurring; there is something in the background that witnesses the actions of the mind and body. This experience alone is enough to alter your conception of yourself. It wakes us up to the fact that there is something in the background – a witnessing principle. Few of us, however, have this experience naturally for we tend to lose ourselves in the actions of the body and mind. This witnessing principle in man is called awareness in yoga.

It seems that awareness is a special privilege of man. Animals perform actions without ever knowing that they are doing them. Man has this ability, though it is rarely used. Most of us are totally absorbed in our thoughts and physical bodies. So much so that we regard our actions as our nature. By becoming aware we are able to watch ourselves and see how superficial our personality, composed of our mind and body, really is. Awareness leads us to the understanding that our nature is something else other than mind and body. The mind and body are only our grosser vehicles.

Yoga tries to increase awareness so that a person can actually watch himself, his bodily activities and mental processes. One can watch the thought processes as though he is watching television. The thoughts appear like a television program. Let us take this analogy. If we watch television then most of us know that we are not a part of the program, we are only members of the audience. We are not really involved. However, if the program is

interesting we can completely lose ourselves in the drama being enacted so that we forget we are watching. We become part of the story. Our thinking process is like a good film, sometimes emotional, sometimes exciting, other times depressing. Whatever its contents may be, it is so appealing that most of us spend twenty-four hours every day totally lost in the absorbing mental processes. We are totally engrossed in the mind show. In fact even those who are now reading these words are most likely caught up in the thought processes. At present are you completely identified with your thoughts? The answer is probably yes. And it is not so easy to break down the magnetic appeal of the mind and to merely watch the thoughts, to be aware. When a television program or a movie finishes we automatically remember that we are only watching and that we are not involved. But from birth all of us have been lost in the mental show so that we never realize its superficial nature. We see the mind, its activities and the body as the totality of our being. Yet we have this ability to stand back from the mental show and watch it as an impartial witness. Each of us has this potential, this ability, yet few of us know it or use it. Yoga specifically tries to flower this witnessing principle.

For many people this awareness doesn't sound very inspiring, even if they believe that it is possible. Why make such a fuss over the trivial ability to be able to watch one's own thoughts, they may ask. Yet if one becomes more aware and starts to witness his activities then incredible experiences occur. He starts to realize things that are completely beyond present comprehension. It can take him into a new dimension of existence. At the moment most people are trapped by their minds in the same way an actor in a film is limited by his role and the celluloid film. If he could materialize and become a three-dimensional person then he would be able to jump beyond his previous two-dimensional limitations. His whole concept of existence would alter. His role would expand beyond that of the film, beyond that which would even be understandable in his film language and concepts. It is the same with nearly all people. Our identification with the mind and body keeps us trapped in a limited realm of existence. We imprison ourselves, yet we have the keys to become free again. By jumping outside the fetters of personality,

mind and body, we can tune in with higher and freer dimensions of existence. The key is awareness.

Consciousness is within each and every one of us. There are no exceptions. We can never create it or develop it. It is already there; all we have to do is to tune in with it. We have to become aware. We have to act from our basic nature, consciousness, which lies in the background of all our physical and mental actions. We actually cannot expand consciousness, for consciousness is infinite and all pervasive. How can we expand something which is infinite and everywhere? What we actually do is to expand awareness. Awareness is the variable that can be developed in all of us. It is the ability that can be developed to tune in with consciousness, the ability to identify with consciousness. This is only semantics, but it defines what we mean by these terms. Other people may use the words in a different context, possibly as interchangeable words, but our meaning is as we have just explained.

It is a common misconception that consciousness is a function of the brain and is dependent on it. Many people think that the brain is the master and that if there is no brain then there will be no consciousness. Nothing could be more incorrect. However, verbally or rationally we cannot demonstrate this, nor do we really want to. If you develop your awareness you will definitely conclude this for yourself, for how can consciousness watch the activities of the mind or brain if the brain is the master or basic instrument. The consciousness must be beyond the brain in order to be able to watch the activities of the brain and mind. Usually consciousness is associated with and tied to the activities of the brain and sensory organs through our ignorance of its nature. We are never faced with its existence for it is disguised by our everyday activities. If we see a book we naturally assume that it is the eyes that have seen it. This is so obvious we never question the truth of this assumption. But actually this is incorrect. The eyes are only the intermediary instruments between the outside world and consciousness. It is consciousness that actually sees. If we hear we tend to assume that it is the ears that hear, but actually they too are really only intermediaries. It is not even the brain that sees and hears, for this is only an instrument. In themselves, the sensory organs

and the brain are no more than receivers, transformers and transmitters. Let us take the analogy of the radio again. The radio picks up electromagnetic waves and converts them to sound vibrations which we can hear. The radio itself cannot hear, it acts as a mediator that picks up the waves and converts them to a suitable form that we can hear. The sensory organs and the brain are exactly the same; they cannot hear, see, taste, smell or feel. They can only pick up sensations, convert them to suitable signals for utilization by the brain from where they are perceived by consciousness. Without consciousness each one of us would be incapable of doing anything; we would be lifeless and would know nothing.

For western philosophy the mind is the hub of man; for yoga it is consciousness that is the central and most basic aspect. And this consciousness is not fettered and bound by finitude. It is infinite and unbound. Our deepest nature is infinite, for it is consciousness. It is not mind. The mind is merely the instrument of consciousness and the storehouse of our finite personality.

Man has the ability to tune in with and know this consciousness; he can become more aware. Animals have the same consciousness yet they are unable to know it. Man has the potential to function from consciousness by liberating himself from the shackles of mind and body. Of course, the mind and body perform the same functions; nothing changes in this respect. But a person who becomes more aware knows himself to be consciousness and nothing else. He identifies himself with consciousness and not mind and body.

Development of awareness

The first thing to remember is that no indocination or autosuggestion is required. If you practise yoga then it will automatically show itself or to be more exact, if you do your practices correctly then awareness will gradually develop. There are many different methods to increase awareness. In fact all the different methods of yoga – karma yoga, bhakti yoga, mantra yoga and kriya yoga – are designed for this purpose. They all use different methods to achieve the same end.

When you do asanas and pranayama, as well as meditation techniques, that we will shortly introduce, the emphasis should be on

awareness. This awareness implies that your attention is directed to a specific function or activity. It means that your attention is on something specific, perhaps breath, and that you simultaneously know that your attention is on that particular activity. In other words, if you are aware of your breath it means that you know that you are breathing and you are witnessing the breathing process. You are standing back and watching something that is occurring within you. It is the first step up the ladder to higher awareness. You are becoming a witness to all the activities of the body. This will lead eventually to the ability to witness the actions of the mind and then gradually the deeper aspects of mind which you may now think impossible.

This is the essence of awareness – the fact that you know that you are doing something and that you are observing the action. If you move the body and at the same time don't realize that your body is moving and simultaneously observe the movement, then you are not aware. To be a witness is to be aware. To be totally lost, involved and identified with an action is to be unaware.

When one practises asanas, pranayama and meditation practices awareness is essential. Without it these yogic practices lose their significance and ninety percent of their benefits. If you are angry, worried or unhappy and your mind is playing havoc, don't worry. If you are doing your asanas and you are overwhelmed by streams of thoughts when we have advised you to be aware of breath, don't by any means become frustrated. Merely watch the stream of thoughts and the breath, witness them, be aware of them.

The practice of asanas, pranayama and meditation practices develops awareness on a temporary basis. They give one a taste of what awareness means at a rudimentary level. From them, it is possible with effort to be a witness to your thoughts and physical actions throughout the day. One can watch, observe the body and mind performing the duties in the way they have been designed. One watches the antics of the body and mind as one would watch a puppet.

So when doing yoga practices be aware of what you are doing. The whole point of yoga is to unfold and make you aware of your deeper aspects.

Meditation: Body Awareness (Part 1)

In the preceding topic we explained the necessity of developing awareness. Everything done in yoga should be done with as much awareness as possible so that we can develop the potential of awareness to the maximum. All yogic practices, whether they are asanas or pranayama etc., help to progressively increase one's awareness if done in the right way with regular practice and over a period of time. The following technique is very simple and will make you more able to observe and feel the different parts of the body. In a way it is similar to shavasana and can be used to induce relaxation in the same way, just as shavasana is an excellent technique for developing awareness¹. The practice we will now describe and shavasana can also really be regarded as meditation techniques. There is no hard and fast division between relaxation techniques, techniques to develop awareness and meditation techniques. They all basically aim at the same thing and are interchangeable.

This practice is intended to make you aware of your body. Your awareness will be directed to different parts. You have to feel the accompanying sensations and try to create a mental picture of that part of the body. If you can't do this don't worry, only try. Remember, the aim is to be an observer, a spectator of the different parts of the body. Try not to lose yourself in the thinking process. Try to be aware.

In many practices that we will introduce you to in the future one has to be aware of different parts of the body. Without the ability to be aware of these different parts the techniques lose much of their effectiveness. As such the following method can be considered as a preliminary to higher yogic practices. Also this technique will help one to be more aware during asana practice.

BODY AWARENESS

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your back in the same way as described for shavasana¹. Fully adjust yourself so that there is no discomfort.

If you feel any need to move your body or think you might want to during the practice, move it now instead of disturbing yourself later.

In fact it is better to move your body now even if you don't think you need to; this will preclude any tendency to move the body during the practice.

Your palms should be open and facing upwards or in any position that you find comfortable. Relax the whole body as much as possible (if necessary do shavasana immediately before this practice).

Close your eyes. Be aware of your body. Try to mentally create a picture of your body and feel your body.

Be a witness. Be aware. Try to become aware of the sense perceptions.

For a short time try to observe as many sensations as you can throughout the entire body.

Then after about a minute be aware of the skin sensations of the right foot. Be aware, though this will be difficult at first. Is your foot cold, warm, tight or whatever? Feel it.

Then slowly move your awareness to the calves and thighs, all the time being aware of skin sensations. Feel that they are affecting your body, not your perception.

Try to feel these sensations in the body; nowhere else.

Repeat the same thing with the left leg, starting with the foot.

Then be aware of the fingertips of the right hand. Create a mental picture and at the same time feel the sensations. Again feel whether they are hot, cold or whatever. Slowly move your awareness along the palm, the wrist, the

forearm and the upper arm to the shoulders, all the time being aware of the mental picture and feelings. Repeat the same thing with the left arm. Be aware.

Now feel the sensations of your cheeks; this is a very sensitive part of the body and should be easy for most people to feel its sensations. Try to create a mental picture. Do your cheeks feel warm, sensitive, cold or what? Be aware for a minute or so.

Then repeat the same thing with the lips. Are they dry or moist? Then be aware of the tongue. Feel the saliva in which it bathes, or does it feel dry?

Be aware of your ears. What sounds do you hear? Be aware of the sounds entering the ears and feel that they are not affecting your being; you are only watching them.

Be aware of the eyes. Roll the eyes keeping the eyelids closed and feel any sensations that occur. See the different patterns that occur in front of your closed eyes. Be a witness; this should be much easier.

Now be aware of the framework of the body. Create a mental picture of your skeletal structure. Feel that your whole body is supported and held in shape by your bones. Be aware.

Feel the rigidity of the bone connecting the knee to the foot of the right leg. Create a mental image and feel it; be aware. Then be aware of the thigh bone. Do this for one minute. Then repeat the same thing with the left leg.

Then be aware of the bone that gives structure to the right arm. See it as something separate from yourself. Be aware of the bone that holds the right biceps firmly in place. Repeat the same thing with the left arm.

Then feel and see a mental picture of the box-like structure of the chest closed off at the top by the shoulders.

Be aware of the whole spinal column from top to bottom. Start from the base and slowly try to be aware of the different parts as you progressively move your awareness towards the top of the spine. This is a little difficult but with practice you will clearly feel and mentally see the spine. Do this for a minute or so, if necessary moving your awareness up and down a number of times.

Try to feel the whole body again. If possible see a mental image of your body. Be aware of

as many body processes as you can. Feel the contact points of the body with the floor.

Do this for a minute or so. Slowly move your body. Open your eyes. This is the end of the practice.

Awareness

This practice is intended to develop your ability to visualize the different parts of the body as well as the processes of awareness. Try to be a witness as far as you are able throughout the practice. If your attention wanders from the practice don't worry but try to be aware of the mental processes that occur. This is the most difficult part for we tend to lose ourselves in our thoughts. Don't become tense if you suddenly realize that your attention was located elsewhere. Accept this as a natural tendency of the mind. Once you are aware that your attention was elsewhere, continue the practice from the point at which you were sidetracked.

Place and time

This technique can be practised anywhere at any time. Before and after asanas or before sleep are excellent times.

Anatomy

Those who wish can refer to an elementary text book on anatomy to see the exact nature of the skeleton. This is not essential but it will help in gaining the full benefits from the practice we have described as well as forthcoming techniques.

Verbal instruction

This practice is quite long and one can forget the order of the instructions or more likely fall asleep. If you have a friend who is also interested in yoga practices you can easily overcome this problem. One of you should assume the role of teacher and the other the role of student. The teacher can read out the instructions that we have given adding personal touches and advice where suitable, while the student carries out the practice. After this, of course, the roles are reversed.

Notes

- ¹ Shavasana (Part 1) – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;
(Part 2) – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Daily Practice Program

Use whichever of the following programs you find suitable, modifying it as you see fit. We have omitted various practices from previous lessons. Apply them as required. If at any stage

you feel the need of rest, practice shavasana for a couple of minutes before commencing the next practice or whenever you have the time during the day.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	3 each stage	5
Simha Kriya	—	3
Gatyatmak Meru Wakrasana	20 rounds	2
Saithalyasana	—	4
Sphinx Asana	3	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Marjari-asana	15	3
Naukasana	3 rounds	4
Samaveta Pranayama	—	5
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	8
Body awareness	—	10
		60
Program 2: duration ½ hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	2 each stage	4
Simha Kriya	—	2
Shashankasana	—	3
Sphinx Asana	2	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	4
Body awareness	—	10
		30

Program 3: duration $\frac{1}{4}$ hour

Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Supta Pawanmuktasana	2 each stage	3
Simha Kriya	—	1
Sphinx Asana	2	2
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 1	—	4
		15

When you have time practise Shavasana, Naukasana,
or the practice of body awareness.

Lesson 4

By practise when the function of prana ceases then mind achieves steadiness and nirvana dawns. (5:78:46)

When prana ceases its movement the air becomes still. In the same way, when the breath is stilled the mind will also become still. (6:69:41)

O Ram, by the cessation of prana, cessation of mind likewise takes place. Even as the shadow follows the body, so does the mind follow the prana. (5:13:83)

O Ram, he who is able to control the prana can be master of all kinds of siddhis and achieve liberation. (6:80:83)

—*Yoga Vasishtha*

Hatha Yoga: Kunjal Kriya

This is a technique for cleaning the digestive tract from the stomach to the mouth. It involves drinking warm, salty water until the stomach is full and then voluntarily expelling it through the mouth. This may seem a little repulsive to some people, especially if done intentionally, but actually kunjal kriya is a simple practice and all that is vomited is salty water containing impurities from the stomach. As such there is no unpleasant taste, smell and nausea accompanying the action as there is during times of sickness. It is these uncomfortable sensations that all of us find repulsive. Without these disagreeable factors the practice of kunjal kriya becomes simple and not at all unpleasant.

The biggest obstacle in trying this practice for yourself is your mental concept of what is involved. Try to throw away your prejudices and read this chapter with an open mind. Then attempt the practice once yourself, either alone or under the guidance of a yoga teacher. If you find from personal experience that what we say is true, then you will more than likely continue to do this kriya regularly.

Is this a natural process?

Vomiting is normally the last resort of the stomach to throw out impure, excessively rich or heavy food. It is a natural physical process but only as a last resort. To purposely vomit is in a sense unnatural but we have found from experience, as did the ancient yogis who originated the technique, that it can do much to improve the functioning of the stomach and in turn the whole physical body. If we treated the stomach with more care then it would not be necessary to do kunjal kriya, but most of us sadly mistreat our stomachs. It is under these circumstances that intentional vomiting becomes most useful as a means of removing the impurities that contaminate the body.

Terminology

The practice is known by various names. When the vomiting is induced by tickling the back of the throat it is called kunjal kriya or vaman dhauti. Both *kunjal* and *vaman* mean 'vomiting'; *kriya* means 'practice' and *dhauti* means 'wash'.

When the water is expelled by muscular contraction of the abdomen, it is called kunjara kriya or gaja karma. Both the words *kunjara* and *gaja* mean 'elephant'. The word *karma* in this context means the same as *kriya*, namely practice or action. Therefore, in English this technique is called the elephant action. It is so called because it imitates the ability of an elephant to suck in water and to expel it at will, though actually an elephant expels water from the trunk, not from the stomach.

The stomach

The stomach seems to cause us more problems than any other organ in the body. We are able to forget most other organs while they carry out their duties, but the stomach often reminds us of its presence, especially when it is not working properly. Most people treat the stomach with little respect. They tend to stuff it with all types of food without consideration for its delicate nature. This kind of treatment is the root cause of many ailments which disturb us both physically and mentally.

Let us briefly consider the mechanism of the upper part of the digestive tract, the alimentary canal. The food that we eat is first of all masticated in the mouth, or at least it should be. It then passes along a narrow flexible tube called the oesophagus into the stomach.

The stomach is a bag-like organ located below the heart. When it is empty it resembles a medium-sized sock. It is capable of expanding quite considerably when filled with the food that we eat. It has thick, muscular walls which are far thicker than any other part of the digestive tract.

The purpose of the stomach is to churn and to break down the food before it enters the intestines. In the walls of the stomach there are multitudes of glands (an estimated 35,000,000) which secrete digestive juices. These are of various types and are called gastric juices. During the course of the day several litres are poured into the stomach to digest the food we consume. An important constituent of these digestive juices is hydrochloric acid. This is essential for complete digestion of food, but it can also cause us many problems such as hyperacidity and ulcers.

The food spends several hours in the stomach, depending on the nature of the food: simple and easily digestible food stays a relatively short period while certain types of food such as meat stay for a longer time. The food is progressively broken down to a more convenient form for the intestines to handle. When the food attains a suitable consistency it is passed to the small intestines through the pyloric valve at the lower end of the stomach. In the intestines the nutrients in the food are absorbed by the bloodstream and the waste products proceed to the anus for expulsion from the body.

The importance of this system needs no emphasis. It should be kept clean and in the healthiest possible condition if it is to retain its efficiency and to remain free from disease. Kunjal kriya specifically does this as well as removing acidity. It is therefore a panacea for those who have digestive ailments and for those who want to maintain the health that they already have.

Preparation of water

The water can be either with or without salt. We leave this to the practitioner's choice. The deciding factor depends on why you are doing the practice. Salt water inhibits the secretion of acid in the stomach, therefore those people who are trying to alleviate hyperacidity should definitely put salt in the water. For other purposes both unsalted and salted are suitable. If you add salt to the water a reasonable proportion is one teaspoonful per litre of water. However, the proportion is not critical and more or less can be added at your discretion.

We recommend that the water be lukewarm, about body temperature. However, again this

is flexible. Water can be taken directly from the tap but it should not be too cold. This is important for during the practice the stomach will be filled with a large volume of water; if it is too cold it could easily chill the body. Prepare about three litres of warm water per person, this should be more than sufficient. Needless to say the water should be clean.

Do kunjal in the bathroom. If the weather is warm it can be done in the garden.

Posture

During expulsion of water it is best to stand and bend forwards keeping the trunk and head horizontal. This facilitates the free flow of water from the stomach.

KUNJAL KRIYA

Quickly drink one glass of water. Then take another glass and drink it as rapidly as possible.

Continue drinking glasses of water until you think you cannot possibly take another drop. Then take just one more glass. This may be a little difficult but it is essential to fill the stomach as fully as possible.

Under these circumstances the urge to throw out the water from the stomach hardly needs to be stimulated, it may even occur spontaneously.

6 medium sized glasses of water are about the average number required to fill the stomach. Then from a standing position lean forwards over a wash basin, bowl or convenient place in the garden.

Make sure the trunk is as horizontal as possible. Then open your mouth as wide as possible and place 2 or 3 fingers (the middle 3) on top of the tongue.

Slowly and gently slide the fingers along the surface of the tongue towards the back of the throat, while simultaneously pressing the root of the tongue.

This should induce the water to suddenly and effortlessly gush out from the stomach.

If there is no expulsion of water then it means that the tips of the fingers are not sufficiently far enough down the throat or that you are not pressing the tongue.

Though your first reaction is to tense the body and resist the urge to expel the water you should try to relax and allow for a free flow of

water from the stomach; this is difficult at first but becomes easy with practice.

During expulsion of water the fingers should be removed from the mouth. When the flow of water ceases, again place the fingers in the mouth and repeat the process.

Continue in this way until there is no more water in the stomach.

This is indicated when tickling the back of the throat does not bring up any more water.

Now you have completed the practice. If necessary do jala neti to clean out the nose.

ADVANCED VARIATION: KUNJARA KRIYA

This method does not rely on tickling the back of the throat and tongue. It relies instead on squeezing the water-filled stomach by contracting the abdomen. It is a little more difficult than the previous method and requires some practice. We will not describe it in detail for it does not give any worthwhile advantages over the simpler method.

Technique

Fill your stomach with water.

While standing, bend forwards and place the hands on the knees.

Open the mouth.

Slowly breathe in making a whispering *ah* sound from the deeper parts of the throat.

Simultaneously contract the upper part of the abdomen, just below the ribcage. At the end of inhalation, retain the compression of the abdomen and exhale.

If this is done correctly the water should gush out of the mouth in a steady stream.

It is important that one relaxes the body during expulsion so that the water is not impeded. This method is for those people who have a reasonable control over their body muscles.

Time and frequency

The time of practice depends on the prevailing climate. It should not be done outside if the weather is cold. This is important, for kunjara removes much of the mucus lining of the stomach and thereby temporarily renders the stomach more vulnerable to chilling. After a short time, however, the mucus film regenerates itself and thereby gives the stomach the

necessary protection. If you practise indoors and your home is reasonably warm then the outside weather has little influence and you can practice kunjara regardless of the climate.

The best time to do the practice is early in the morning, before breakfast. However, if the atmosphere is cold inside and outside your house, you should practise later in the day when it becomes warmer. One should wait at least half an hour after completing the practice before taking food. This allows sufficient time for the stomach to reline itself.

Normally this kriya should not be done after meals. Wait for at least four hours. This allows the stomach to perform its duties and empty itself of its contents. This process takes at least four hours (depending of course on how much food you eat) and if you do the practice prematurely you will vomit the food you have eaten. There is a similar technique which does this purposely (*vyaghra kriya*) but this is under specific circumstances. We will discuss this practice at the end of this topic.

Many people do this practice every morning without fail followed by jala neti. They consider this routine essential for maintaining their best possible health. If you have the time we also recommend daily practice as it can certainly do no harm and gives many wonderful benefits. If you have limited time try to do it as often as possible, at least once a week.

General advice

The biggest hurdle to overcome with this practice is the disgust we attach to the idea of vomiting. When you try it for the first time and even on the second and third occasion you will have to use a little willpower to actually carry it out to the full. It is very easy to drink only one glass and persuade oneself that the stomach is now full; or to make plans to do the practice and then postpone it at the last moment until another day under the guise of some suitable excuse. But once you become accustomed to the idea and have tried it a few times it is no more difficult than cleaning the teeth and does not take much more time.

Don't try to vomit once the stomach is empty. As soon as the vomiting reflex brings up no water this is a sure indication that you have cleaned out the stomach. If you persist unnecessarily you will more than likely produce soreness of the throat as well as

experiencing an unpleasant taste. One often sees brown or yellow traces in the expelled water, especially on the first few attempts at doing the practice. Don't worry for this is no more than dead blood cells, fermented food particles and mucus from the stomach. As you progressively clean the stomach over a period of a few days, the water will become cleaner and cleaner, a sure sign that the stomach is being thoroughly cleaned.

Many teachers say that the best way to induce expulsion of water is to touch the uvula (the small grape-like pendant hanging from the soft palate above the root of the tongue). We don't advise this as from experience we have found that it tends to cause retching and not a smooth elimination of water. We suggest that you press the root of the tongue. If you find that you really cannot remove the water from your stomach, don't worry. Though you will lose the benefits of kunjal it will not cause any harm. The water will merely pass through the system in the normal way. It may give a looser than normal bowel motion and if you suffer from constipation this is not such a bad result.

Limitations

Most people can do this practice. However, it should not be attempted by those suffering from hernia of the stomach or abdomen, high blood pressure and heart problems.

Though kunjal kriya helps to remove excess acidity from the stomach, a factor very much associated with ulcers, we don't advise you to try to do this practice under these circumstances. It will probably do more harm than good.

If you have any doubts about whether you should or should not do kunjal kriya we recommend that you seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Benefits

This technique gives the best possible wash to the digestive system from the stomach to the mouth. As such it helps remove all diseases of this region which are the result of a build-up of toxins or general impurities. It also helps to eradicate bad breath, the accumulation of phlegm in the throat and sore throats.

Most of us at one time or another have had stomach problems. There are various causes – eating too much food, eating food

that is too rich, bad or that is impure, as well as over-secretion of gastric juices, particularly acid, due to emotional upsets or sustained stress. Kunjal cannot change your food habits and certainly cannot remove mental and emotional tension. However, it can help to keep the stomach in good order by washing it clean of impurities. The salt water also reduces the secretion of acid from the glands in the stomach. These in general are rendered more efficient thus allowing better digestion of food. All these are important factors in preventing indigestion, obtaining the best possible assimilation of nutrients into the body as well as eliminating other digestive ailments.

Whenever you feel a little queasy in the stomach, perhaps early in the morning, we certainly recommend kunjal to bring relief.

There is another factor that makes kunjal so useful. There is a tendency for the residue of undigested food to lie in the bottom of the stomach after all the easily digested food has passed to the intestines. This is particularly the case if one has a distended stomach, for the bottom of the stomach is more than likely below the level of the outlet to the intestines (pyloric valve). This acts as a reservoir in which fermentation takes place. When one eats the next meal this residue is mixed with incoming food and can pass into the intestines. This can contaminate and poison the system, for much of it will be absorbed into the bloodstream from the intestines. Kunjal kriya throws this fermented waste out of the stomach before it can cause harm. As such kunjal is a sure way of preventing autopoisoning of the body.

People who suffer from biliousness inform us that kunjal gives them marvellous relief. When they expel the water it is green in colour, which indicates the presence of bile. Actually the bile is secreted from the gall bladder into the intestines below the stomach, but somehow or other it often finds its way up into the stomach, especially if it is over-secreted. Kunjal brings wonderful relief by eliminating the accumulation of this nauseating and bitter tasting bile.

Asthmatics find kunjal a wonderful practice. Why this is so is not certain for there is no obvious connection between the lungs (the site of asthma) and cleansing the stomach with water, but we do know that it does bring relief. This is confirmed by the large blobs of phlegm

which are thrown out by asthmatics during kunjal. Possibly expulsion of water from the stomach simultaneously stimulates a nervous reflex action in the lungs, which in turn expels mucus secretions from the bronchial tubes. This helps to remove blockages in the respiratory passages of the lungs and brings great relief to the asthma sufferer by allowing him to breathe more easily.

People who suffer from asthma should and can perform kunjal when they are actually having an attack. It is found to terminate the spasm. In this case it is essential that the stomach is completely filled with water to obtain the best results. Though it may be difficult to drink the water down quickly because of shortage of breath, you must try; with determination it can be accomplished. One should actually resist the urge to vomit so that the stomach can be filled to the brim – bloated in fact. The bronchial tubes, which tighten and contract during an attack of asthma, relax as soon as one expels the water. This brings much needed and instant relief.

VIAGHRA KRIYA

This practice is also called *baghi kriya*. Both *vyaghra* and *baghi* mean 'tiger'. This technique is therefore known as the tiger action of regurgitation. It is a similar practice to kunjal but a large portion of semi-digested food as well as water is expelled from the stomach.

The tiger has been observed to gorge itself with its prey and then regurgitate the remnants of the food from the stomach three or four hours later. There is a good reason for this. It is the portion of the food which is most difficult to digest that stays in the stomach longest. The most nutritious and easily digestible portions quickly pass through the stomach into the intestines. The remainder contains far less nutrition and requires a lot of energy and activity by the digestive organs to eliminate it. The expenditure of the body is probably far greater than the gain. The tiger, therefore, vomits this unrequired portion and so saves overworking the intestines.

The ancient yogis had taken heed of this sensible habit of the tiger and used it for their own benefit. They took their food in the normal way and then three hours later expelled the remaining undigestible or

difficult to digest portion. This saved them many intestinal ailments and discomforts and allowed the energy in the body to be directed towards more useful purposes. Vyaghra kriya was also practised most effectively by the later emperors of the Roman Empire, who used it to avoid indigestion after their famous orgies.

Technique

Perform the technique of kunjal kriya, filling the stomach with water.

When the water is expelled it will simultaneously empty the stomach of the undigested particles of food.

Try to prevent food particles from entering the nose.

Do jala neti after the practice to ensure that the nose is cleared¹.

It should be done about 3 hours after food. If you eat impure food or overload the stomach it can be done much earlier.

Benefits

This prevents burdening the intestines with undigestible food. However, it has another more obvious use. If we eat bad, rotten, rich or bulky food the stomach often causes us to vomit. It is a natural process of the body. However, this is the last resort of the body for it usually tries to digest the food that we have dumped in the stomach. This leads to a lot of heaviness, discomfort and it takes many hours for the digestive system to settle down. The easiest way to prevent this unnecessary disruption of intestines is to vomit as soon as possible. This sounds a little distasteful but it takes only a minute or so and it prevents much discomfort.

The modern day remedy for indigestion or eating too much rich food is to swallow a tablet. Yet the natural and least harmful way is to vomit. We therefore recommend vyaghra kriya to those who want to bring their digestive system quickly back into shape again.

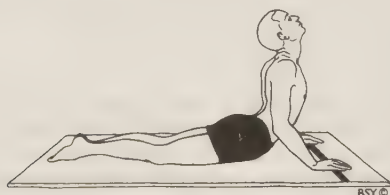
Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

BHUJANGASANA (COBRA POSE)

Bhujangasana emulates the action of the cobra raising itself just prior to striking at its prey. We have already discussed ardha bhujangasana, which is the preparatory pose for mastering bhujangasana¹. If your back is stiff then you should do ardha bhujangasana just before doing bhujangasana. Otherwise bhujangasana alone is sufficient.



Technique

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight and the soles of the feet uppermost.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor below and slightly to one side of the shoulders; the fingers should point forwards and the arms should be bent with the elbows facing backwards.

Rest the forehead on the ground.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body, especially the lower back.

This is the starting position.

Breathe out slowly and deeply.

Then as you breathe in raise the body in the way we will describe.

Slowly bend your head backwards so that the chin eventually points forwards and the back of the neck is compressed. Feel the stretch of the front part of the neck.

Now the arms must be brought into play.

Slowly raise the head and shoulders off the ground by progressively straightening the arms.

Feel the flexion of the back roll down the spine starting from the neck region and working

towards the lower back; try to feel the flexion of each individual vertebra throughout the movement. Remember, it is the arms that execute the movement.

Keep the back and legs as relaxed as possible. Try to keep the navel in contact with the ground; if the navel is raised too high then the bend tends to be at the knees and not the back.

Continue slowly to arch the back as far as flexibility will allow.

In this position the back of your head should point towards your feet.

Your arms may or may not be straight – it depends on the flexibility of your back.

You will feel tension in the face and will be tempted to open your mouth; try to relax the facial muscles and keep the mouth closed.

You will feel a pleasantly painful sensation in the lower back; this is a good sign that you are doing the asana correctly. Hold this final pose for as long as comfortable.

On exhalation return to the starting position in the same way that we have just described, but in the opposite order. The movement should be slow and synchronized with the breath.

Remember, at the end of the movement the nose should brush along the floor so that eventually the forehead rests on the ground.

Relax the whole body.

Final position for beginners

Beginners, especially if they have stiff backs, will probably find it difficult to stay in the final position for more than a few seconds. They should perform the asana as follows:

Raise the body while inhaling as already described.

Hold the breath in the final position for a short period of time without strain. Make sure the back and legs are as relaxed as possible.

Then lower the body while exhaling. Repeat this movement a number of times.

Final position for those with supple backs

This form of the final position gives the most benefits. We advise everyone to adopt it when their back becomes sufficiently flexible.

Raise the body in the way already described.

In the final position first of all breathe in and out normally a few times.

Ensure that the back is relaxed.

Then inhale deeply, while simultaneously pushing the shoulders a little further backward in line with the spine.

We emphasize that the back must remain relaxed throughout. It should take no part in executing the movement. If you tense the back muscles then this directly opposes the aim to accentuate the arch of the back. It is the lower back that one tends to tense.

One's awareness should be directed to relaxing this area as much as possible. If this part of the back is relaxed then the rest of the back will almost certainly follow suit.

During this inhalation feel the flexion of the lower back.

Then exhale and let the navel sink further downwards.

This will occur automatically, producing a not disagreeable twinge of pain in the lower back.

This will further arch the back. Try not to resist this flexion by tensing the muscles.

Then breathe in and repeat the process again.

Do this a number of times and then return to the starting position while exhaling.

Mistakes to avoid

The most common error is to raise the abdomen off the ground. This is wrong for it bends the legs and not the back. If this is done then the asana fails to give many of its benefits. Often the hands are placed either too far in front of or behind the shoulders. The position can be adjusted according to the flexibility of your back, but normally the hands should be placed beside the shoulders.

Many people let their mouth sag open. Keep the mouth closed but without tensing the facial muscles. Often the head is allowed to drop forwards. This reduces the influence of the asana on the neck region. Hold your head as far back as possible. Some people tend to treat this asana as though it is one in a series of physical jerks. Amidst gasping and straining of all the body muscles together with facial contortions they attempt to force their

back to arch. This is totally wrong. Relax the body as much as possible.

Awareness and duration

One should be aware of breathing and movement throughout the practice. Make sure that the breath is synchronized with the movement as this helps to obtain the best possible benefits from the asana. Be aware also of the back and its relaxation, particularly the lower back. In the final pose be aware of the flexion of the lower back.

Three minutes is a reasonable time to spend performing this asana whether you stay in the final pose or whether you repeat the movement several times. However, you can use your discretion in choosing a suitable duration of practice.

Sequence

This asana gives the most benefits if it is preceded or followed by a forward bending asana.

Limitations

Those people who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not do this asana. If you have any other complaint that you think may preclude practice of bhujangasana seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

Benefits

This asana increases the flexibility of the back and massages the abdominal organs. It gives many other similar benefits.

In particular it influences the kidneys and the adrenal glands. The kidneys purify our blood. During bhujangasana they are compressed thereby removing stagnant blood. On resumption of the starting position the kidneys are irrigated with a fresh supply of blood. A massage of these important organs is normally difficult for they are comparatively inaccessible. Bhujangasana overcomes this difficulty, improves the efficiency of the kidneys and thereby the health of the whole body. The adrenal glands, situated on top of the kidneys, also receive a good massage and so are encouraged to work more efficiently. These glands secrete various hormones which have vast repercussions on our mind and body. The secretion of adrenalin which affects our degree

of tension or relaxation is regulated. This helps give our mental and physical constitution more stability. Cortisone is another major hormone secreted by the adrenal glands. This has been found to be closely associated with the occurrence of rheumatism. Bhujangasana helps to maintain and encourage the correct secretion of this hormone and has been found very useful in alleviating rheumatism.

Various ailments and general unhealthiness of the body occur through stiffness of the spine. Remember the spine is the major channel which carries all nervous impulses from the brain to the body. A stiff spine interferes with this system by impeding nerve connections. Efficient nerves require a good blood supply. If the spine is stiff then the back is not flexed sufficiently to squeeze out stagnant blood. Bhujangasana loosens up the spine, removes impure blood from the back region and tones up the nerves. The overall result is better communication between the brain and the rest of the body, leading to increased health.

This asana massages the organs of the abdomen and pelvis such as the stomach, pancreas, liver, gall bladder and sexual and eliminative organs. In particular we recommend it for treating female disorders such as leucorrhoea, dysmenorrhoea and amenorrhoea as it notably tones the ovaries and uterus.

Those people who suffer from a slipped disc or sciatica can also benefit from this asana, but they should be careful. Many people suffer from chronic backache or neckache by sitting in one position for a prolonged period of time or by having a generally stiff and unhealthy spine. Bhujangasana acts as a useful remedy.

The thyroid gland is also regulated. This has a large part to play in maintaining a healthy body and its optimum condition is essential.

Bhujangasana expands the chest, which improves one's breathing habits.

SHASHANK BHUJANGASANA (STRIKING COBRA POSE)

This is an excellent asana combining both shashankasana and bhujangasana to give a smooth and pleasant movement. In this way it combines the benefits of a backward bending asana (bhujangasana) with a forward bending asana (shashankasana)¹.

This does not mean that shashank bhujangasana can replace the other two asanas, for specific benefits are gained from their final static position; shashank bhujangasana is more useful for limbering up the spine by its dynamic action than anything else.



Technique

Assume the final position of shashankasana with the arms outstretched in front of the shoulders¹.

The hands should remain in the same position throughout the whole practice.

Now inhale slowly and deeply while lifting the buttocks off the heels and pushing the body forwards.

Slide your nose and chest so that they just brush the surface of the floor as your body moves forwards.

Gradually transfer the body weight on to the palms as you move further forwards.

Try to arch your back downwards throughout this movement.

At the end of the movement straighten the arms so that the head, chest and shoulders are raised off the ground. Unlike bhujangasana you may find that the navel is not in contact with the ground – this doesn't matter for it depends very much on the starting position of your hands.

Allow the back to relax and sag downwards.

Stay in this position for a few seconds. Raise the buttocks and push them backwards while breathing out.

Don't try to reverse the previous movement, but keep the arms straight. At the end of the movement the buttocks should sit on the heels and once again you will have assumed the starting position.

Relax the whole body for a short time, taking a few breaths.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale on the forward movement. Exhale on the backward movement. Ensure that the

breathing is synchronized with the physical movement.

One should be aware of coordination of movement and breath. Practise up to a maximum of ten times.

Sequence

This asana should be practised directly after shashankasana.

Benefits

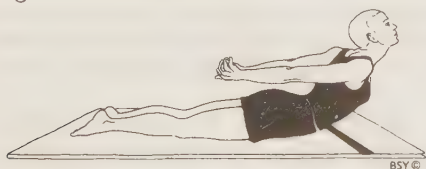
This asana gives similar benefits to bhujangasana and shashankasana¹. However, the other two asanas give their benefits by maintaining the final pose; shashank bhujangasana acts mainly by alternately flexing the spine.

It is particularly useful for toning the female reproductive organs. It is an excellent asana for post-pregnant women to strengthen and tighten the abdominal and pelvic region. It is especially useful for relieving menstrual disorders. It massages and tones the abdominal and pelvic organs and is found to be helpful in promoting good elimination.

The entire back is loosened up, the nerves are stimulated and the back muscles are made pliable. It has been found to be useful in eliminating backache and neckache.

SARPASANA (SNAKE POSE)

This is a wonderful asana for the heart and lungs as well as the back.



Technique

Place a blanket on the floor. Lie flat on your stomach (prone position).

Fold your arms behind your back clasping the wrist of one hand with the fingers of the other hand.

Rest the forehead on the ground.

The legs should be straight and together with the soles facing upwards. Relax the whole body.

Breathe normally for a short time.

Then inhale deeply and slowly, expanding the chest and abdomen as much as possible.

At the end of inhalation slowly bend the head backwards.

When you have bent the head backwards as far as possible slowly start to raise the shoulders and upper back. The movement is executed by contracting the back muscles and tensing the arms.

Raise the body as high as you can without causing any strain.

Hold the final pose while continuing to retain the breath inside.

Ensure that the weight of the body is supported on the soft part of the abdomen – the belly.

The legs should be as relaxed as possible and should remain on the floor throughout.

After a comfortable length of time slowly lower the body to the floor while exhaling.

Completely relax the body in the starting position.

Allow respiration to return to normal. Then repeat this asana up to 5 times.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Inhale while in the starting position; this should be as deep as possible for this has much influence on the benefits obtained. Retain the breath while raising the body and maintaining the final pose. Exhale while lowering the body to the ground again. Remain aware of breathing and the movement. Stay in the final pose for as long as you can retain your breath.

Limitations

Those people who suffer from stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, heart troubles or hernia should not do sarpasana. Seek expert guidance if you are unsure about whether you should or should not do this asana.

More difficult variations

If you have strong back muscles and find the previous basic technique easy try the following more difficult variations. The methods are the same as already described but the positions of the arms are different as follows:

1. Outstretch the arms on each side of the body as though they are wings.
2. Interlock the thumbs and hold the arms straight and on each side of the head, so that the legs, trunk and arms lie in one straight line.

The arms are raised at the same time as the head and shoulders during execution of

the asana. These variations apply a greater pressure on the abdomen and enhance the benefits.

Benefits

This asana helps to strengthen the spinal muscles and gives a good massage to the abdomen and pelvic organs. The benefits in this respect are similar to *bhujangasana*.

Sarpasana has a particularly notable influence on the lungs. The two lungs are composed of millions of alveoli (air cells) which facilitate the exchange of oxygen for carbon dioxide. The oxygen is taken into the body and the carbon dioxide is removed from the body. If these tiny air cells remain active and the lungs elastic then the lungs retain their general health and efficiency. The natural way of maintaining a healthy pair of lungs is regular, deep respiration. This successively inflates and deflates the tiny alveoli and at the same time stretches the elastic tissue of the lungs.

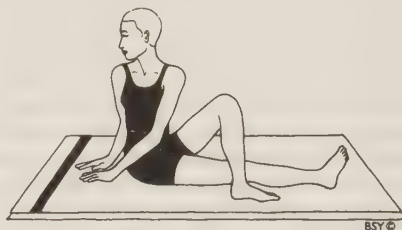
Many people, sad to say, do not breathe properly. They do not use anywhere near the maximum usable capacity of the lungs. Consequently the alveoli tend to become unhealthy through under-activity or inactivity. *Sarpasana* is a useful asana to help rectify this situation. In the final pose the breath is retained inside the lungs and a large proportion of the body weight is supported on the abdomen. This raises the pressure within the abdomen, which in turn pushes the diaphragm towards the chest. This pressurizes the air within the lungs and helps to uncrumple and open out inactive alveoli allowing them to resume their normal duties. The effective surface area of exchange in the lungs is in this way increased. This improves the removal of carbon dioxide from the body and the intake of oxygen for distribution to all parts of the organism.

The heart also benefits from *sarpasana* as the increased pressure within the chest cavity applies a good massage to the heart. Normally, of course, it is impossible to massage the heart for it is imprisoned by the ribs. *Sarpasana* overcomes this obstacle and tones the heart and strengthens its muscles. The whole body is dependent on a good supply of blood and *sarpasana* helps in this way to improve one's physical health.

MERU WAKRASANA (SPINAL TWIST)

An important though small group of asanas are those that twist the spine. *Meru wakra* is one of the simplest of this group. It supplements the backward and forward bending asanas that we have already described.

The Sanskrit word *meru* means 'mountain'. In India the spine is known as the *merudand*, which means 'mountainous stick', for the vertebrae of the spine jut out like a range of mountains. The word *wakra* means 'curved'. The asana is so called because it twists the spine while accentuating its curvature.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Place your hands slightly behind and to the side of the buttocks.

Adjust the fingers so that they point outwards. Lean on your arms for support.

Lift your left foot off the floor and place it on the outside of the right knee. Pivot the body so that the weight is supported by the right arm. Twist the trunk and place the left arm on the right side of the body.

The left hand should be placed beside the right hand with the fingers pointing outwards. Face backwards on the same side as the hands. Relax the whole body.

Make sure that the spine is straight throughout the asana though you can lean backwards as desired.

Gently twist the spine and place the right hand further behind the back. Don't strain but try to place your right hand as far as possible to the left side of the body.

The right arm can be bent if desired. Twist the head further backwards. Again relax the spine. Then using the right arm as a lever, gently twist the spine a little further. This leverage of the right arm allows the spine to be twisted

passively. Relaxation of the spine allows the best possible twist.

If necessary the left arm can be adjusted to provide balance.

Stay in the final pose for a short period of time, breathing normally.

Then return to the starting position. Repeat on the left side of the body.

If you have a stiff spine don't strain by trying to twist further than its flexibility will allow.

Awareness and duration

In the final pose be aware of breath, relaxation of the spine and the application of torsion to the spine.

Do two or three times on each side of the body. Stay in the final position for as long as you wish.

Benefits

This asana twists the whole spine from top to bottom. As such it loosens up all the vertebrae, helps to relocate displaced vertebrae and tones all the nerves within and surrounding the spine.

The massage of the abdomen applied by this asana helps to keep all the internal organs in good shape and it has been found to be useful for relieving backache, neckache, lumbago and mild forms of sciatica. It is also a useful preliminary asana to prepare the back for the more difficult spinal twist asanas.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2

Pranayama

The definition of pranayama is usually given as breath control. Though this may seem a fair interpretation in the light of the practices involved, it does not convey the full significance of pranayama. If one bears in mind what we have already said about prana and the bioplasmic body, one can appreciate that the primary aim of pranayama is to bring about control of far more than one's breath¹. Though oxygen is a form of prana, pranayama is more concerned with influencing the more subtle forms of prana. As such one should not make the mistake of regarding pranayama as merely breathing exercises. Of course the practices do improve the introduction of oxygen into the physical body and the removal of carbon dioxide. Of this there is no doubt, and this in itself brings about wonderful physiological benefits. But pranayama actually uses the breathing process as a means to manipulate all forms of prana within the human framework whether gross or subtle. This in turn has repercussions on the mind and the physical body.

We are not interested in quibbling about word meanings. However, we would like to point out that the word pranayama is generally mistranslated. Prana, as we have already explained, means far more than breath. It is usually taken that prana+yama gives pranayama. Actually this is incorrect. This mistake arises because of the inadequacy of the English alphabet as well as translation of the word by scholars who have no familiarity with the basic aims of pranayama. In the English language there are only twenty six letters, whereas in Sanskrit there are fifty two. This easily leads to haphazard transliteration, for large numbers of Sanskrit letters have no equivalent.

The word *yama* does mean control and is used by Rishi Patanjali who wrote the traditional and illuminating yoga text called the *Yoga Sutras*. He used the word to mean various ethical and personal controls or rules.

But the word that is joined to prana to form pranayama is not yama. It is ayaama. In other words: praana + ayaama gives praanaayaama. The word ayaama has far more implications than the word yama. In a Sanskrit-English dictionary you will find that *ayaama* is defined as follows: stretching, extending, restraining, expansion (of dimensions in time and space).

Thus pranayama means to extend and overcome one's normal limitations. It provides the method whereby one is able to attain higher states of vibratory energy. In other words one is able to activate and to regulate the prana comprising the human framework and thereby make oneself more sensitive to vibrations in the cosmos and within. Pranayama is a method of refining the makeup of one's pranic body, one's physical body and also one's mind. In this way it is possible for a practitioner to become aware of new dimensions of existence. By making the mind calm and still, consciousness is allowed to shine through without distortion.

Pranayama brings new levels of awareness by stopping or restraining distractions of the mind. In other words, it is the continual conflict within the mind that prevents us from experiencing higher states or dimensions of awareness. Pranayama practices reduce thoughts, conflicts, etc. in the mind to a minimum and can even stop the mind processes completely. This restraint of mental activities allows one to know higher levels of existence. Let us take an analogy. If we stand in a room and look at the sun through a dirty window then we don't see and feel the rays of the sun in its purity. If we clean the window then we see the sun in its true glory. The mind in its normal state is the dirty window. Pranayama cleans the mind and allows the consciousness to come through unobstructed. It becomes obvious that pranayama means far more than breath control.

Scriptural references

Pranayama is an important part of yoga practices and as such is mentioned in almost all traditional texts on yoga. We don't intend to quote all these references but will confine ourselves to a few that have a particular relevance to the general aspects of pranayama, leaving specific references until we discuss the practices in detail.

Let us refer to the authoritative *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, an ancient classic on yoga. In our previous discussion on prana we emphasized the relationship between prana and life¹. This is clearly stated as follows: "When there is prana in the body it is called life; when it leaves the body it results in death."

This is exactly what modern scientists have clearly stated – that organic objects are pervaded by bioplasmic energy (which the ancients deemed to call prana) and when this energy leaves the body organism death will occur. That ancient yogis could know about prana without the aid of sophisticated instruments says a lot for their awareness of life and existence. The following *sloka* (verse) is also very enlightening: "When prana fluctuates then the *chitta* (mind) also fluctuates; when the prana becomes steady then the *chitta* also becomes steady." (2:2)

This will be fully discussed shortly. It means that when the pranic body is not functioning properly then the mind is simultaneously disturbed; when the flow of prana is harmonized then the mind is also brought into equanimity. Again this close relationship between these two aspects has been investigated and conclusively found to be as the ancients foretold. The practices of pranayama are intended to bring about calmness in the mind by harmonizing the pranic flow in the body.

Pranayama is concerned with removing congestion in the pranic passages (*nadis*) so that the prana flows smoothly and without hindrance. This is referred to in various *slokas*. We will quote the following as an example: "If pranayama is practised correctly then the entire pranic body will be well-integrated and the prana will flow easily through the *sushumna* (the most important nadi in the whole body), for pranayama will remove all blockages which tend to impede free flow of prana. This will give rise to steadiness of the mind." (2:41–42) This is exactly the same aim as in acupuncture:

the removal of irregularities in the flow of prana. The aim is the same but the means are different.

However a warning is given: "Pranayama can remove all diseases if it is done correctly; if it is done incorrectly then it can actually cause illness." (2:16) This is why one should slowly and systematically develop one's ability to perform pranayama techniques over a period of time. In this course we will introduce you to the various practices step by step in order that you gain the optimum benefits without any unpleasant side effects.

Different methods of regulating prana

There are various methods of manipulating and influencing the flow of prana throughout the whole psychic body. The Chinese developed the two systems of acupuncture and tai chi chu'an to bring the pranic system into balance¹. In the system of tai chi chu'an a series of dynamic movements are used. There are various systems in vogue today, though it is said to have been originated by San Fung Chang. The movements are so designed to bring the negative and positive forces (yin and yang) of the pranic body into balance and coordination. This in turn calms the mind and allows the state of meditation to spontaneously flower.

In yoga the practices of pranayama and asanas are used to bring about the same results. Asanas manipulate and harmonize the energies in the physical and pranic body as well as the mind. If asanas are performed correctly then pranayama is automatically done without effort. In this way there is a direct influence on the human framework via both the physical and pranic body. In pranayama, on the other hand, regulation of the mind and body is accomplished through manipulation of the pranic body by means of the breath. Both pranayama and asanas aim at the same thing. Pranayama has the greatest influence on the mind, however, for it acts through the pranic body which is more intimately linked to the mind than is the physical body.

If one practises the various meditation techniques, then the aim is to bring about relaxation of the mind through the medium of the mind itself. This in turn has repercussions on the pranic body and in turn on the physical body.

In kriya yoga all these different approaches are combined. One simultaneously practises physical movements, specific static body positions and pranayama as well as various meditation practices. This is why kriya yoga is so effective in bringing about changes in one's being.

The nadis or psychic passages

The nadis are pathways along which prana or bioplasmic energy travels. In acupuncture these pathways are known as meridians (at least in modern western terminology). Various ancient yogis said that there are seventy two thousand nadis in the psychic body. Others said the number is in the region of three hundred and twenty thousand. Whatever the number, we can definitely say that they are numerous.

Of these nadis three are particularly important. They are known as the ida, pingala and sushumna. The most important one is the sushumna, which runs within the spine². It should not be confused with or identified with the physical spine that we are normally aware of. This nadi runs from the region of the perineum (between the anus and sexual organs) to the region of the brain. It connects the mooladhara chakra (chakra meaning pranic or psychic centre) in the perineum to ajna (mid-brain) chakra at the top of the spine passing through various other chakras enroute. Again these chakras should not be regarded as physical entities; they are part of the bioplasmic or pranic body. As such they are located within but are not of the physical body.

Emanating from the left side of the mooladhara chakra and passing through the intervening chakras in turn in a curving, criss-crossing path, finally ending up on the left side of the ajna chakra, is the ida nadi. Emerging from the right side of the mooladhara chakra and passing in a similar but opposite sense to that of the ida nadi, up to the right side of ajna, is the pingala nadi.

The ida and pingala nadis are the pathways of the two different aspects of prana. They represent the two opposite poles of the same energy. The ida is denoted as being negative and is also known as the *chandra* (moon) nadi. The pingala, on the other hand, is positive and is often called the *surya* (sun) nadi. Associated

with these two nadis are various attributes or qualities. Some of these are as follows:

Quality	Ida	Pingala
breath	left nostril	right nostril
temperature	cold	hot
sex	female	male
activity	mental	physical
energy	negative	positive
planet	moon	sun
Tao	yin	yang

These two nadis are associated with the two nostrils: pingala with the right and ida with the left. The ancient yogis, with their detailed awareness of the human body, found that the flow of breath did not pass equally through each nostril. In fact at any given time it was more than likely that the flow of air through one nostril would be greater than the other nostril. This is an aspect of our body that even physiologists have never seriously researched. No one seems to have asked the question: "Why have we got two nostrils?" There should be a good reason and perhaps it is directly related to ida and pingala. Incidentally, the reader can test this for himself taking care to remove all mucus from the nose. Merely block each of the nostrils in turn and you should find that the flow is greater through one than the other. If you don't find this to be so, then try at a later time for occasionally the flows are equal.

The yogis of antiquity discovered that when the left nostril had the predominant flow of air then the pranic flow in ida nadi was also predominant. And when the right nostril had the greatest flow the pingala had the greatest flow of prana. The flow of air through the nostrils and consequently the pranic flow continually alternates. Under normal conditions the flow through the left nostril is predominant for about an hour and then the right flow becomes predominant for about an hour. During changeover from one to the other, flows are equal and the prana flows through the sushumna nadi. This generally lasts for a few minutes. These flows can also be artificially altered in response to individual needs. The study of these flows, their meaning and implications in life is the subject of the science of swara yoga¹.

Each of us fluctuates between periods of mental and physical activities. Generally, because of the type of work that each of us does we tend to either do too much mental work or too much physical work. We are either too introverted or too extroverted. There are times when we attempt mental work yet find it more difficult than usual. We generally force ourselves and end up with a headache or in a bad mood. At other times we want to do some physical work yet our mind is not on the job; we are thinking of everything else but the physical work involved. At other times just the opposite is the case – mental work comes easily and without effort; or conversely we can do physical work with zest and enthusiasm. There are auspicious times when we are tuned in to certain types of work. If we are introverted then we are more likely to successfully undertake mental tasks; if we are extroverted then we are more likely to accomplish physical or active work with more success.

A sure indicator of which type of work is suitable is the predominant flow of air in the nostrils. If the right nostril has the greatest flow then we are most likely to be actively inclined. We are more suited to physical work. The mind is extroverted and the body generates more heat. If the left nostril has the greatest flow then the mind is introverted and any kind of mental work can be undertaken. During sleep *ida* is dominant. If *pingala* is flowing it is normally more difficult to sleep. Ideally during meal times *pingala* should flow. If it doesn't then the digestive processes may not be as efficient as they should be.

These two aspects of *prana*, which are particularly characterized by the flows in the *ida* and *pingala* nadis, represent the two most obvious characteristics of each human: the abilities to think and act². The flow of breath through these nostrils and the flow of *prana* through their corresponding nadis greatly influence our lives. Generally the flows are involuntary, but it is possible to manipulate the flows using willpower and various yogic techniques. One of these techniques is *pranayama*, in particular *nadi shodhana* stage 2³.

One can make either of the air flows predominate for a specific reason. For example, if there is work to be done but we feel sleepy, it is possible to muster the necessary physical energy by artificially activating the flow of air

in the right nostril and curbing the flow in the left nostril. This in turn ensures that *pingala* is dominant and that *ida* is subservient. However, under ideal circumstances the flow in each nostril should be dominant for a total of about twelve hours over each daily cycle of twenty-four hours. Under these circumstances one is neither too physically or mentally active.

In *yoga* practices the usual aim is to make the flow in each nostril exactly the same. Again, this is done by means of *pranayama*. When the flow of air is equal in each nostril then the flow in the *ida* and *pingala* nadis is also the same. Under these conditions *prana* begins to flow in the *sushumna*, the most important *nadi* in the bioplasmic body. This is the most auspicious time for the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. In fact, it is said that *prana* must start to flow in the *sushumna* for the experience of meditation to take place. Without this, meditation cannot occur. Under these circumstances one is neither too physically restless nor bombarded with excessive thoughts. One is content in the middle point between the two extremes. This is why *pranayama* is so important in *yoga*. It is an excellent tool in preparing the body and mind so that they become a perfect receiver of higher awareness. *Pranayama* practices help to prepare the ground for meditation.

Modes of pranayama practices

While controlling the breath in *pranayama* practices there are four important activities. These are:

1. *Pooraka* (inhalation)
2. *Rechaka* (exhalation)
3. *Antar* or *antaranga kumbhaka* (retention of breath after inhalation; i.e. with lungs full of air)
4. *Bahir* or *bahiranga kumbhaka* (retention of breath after exhalation; i.e. with lungs emptied as much as possible).

The different practices of *pranayama* involve various techniques; but they all basically use the four listed above. There is also another mode of *pranayama* which is called *kevala kumbhaka*. This is an advanced stage of *pranayama* which automatically occurs during high states of meditation. During this state the pressure in the lungs becomes the same as atmospheric pressure. Respiration ceases and the lungs stop their activity. Under these

circumstances the veil which prevents us seeing into the deeper aspects of existence is lifted and we obtain an intuitional apprehension of higher truths.

The most important part of higher pranayama practices is really kumbhaka, or retention of breath. In fact, in the ancient texts pranayama is also known as kumbhaka. However, to be able to perform kumbhaka with some degree of success there must be a gradual development of one's control over the function of respiration. As such, in most of the practices of pranayama, there is a lot of emphasis on inhalation and exhalation, which are also important in revitalizing the physical and pranic bodies. As such we will introduce all aspects of pranayama practice that will be of use to the reader and will include all the four modes we have already mentioned.

The role of pranayama in meditation techniques

Pranayama is an essential prelude and integral part of kriya yoga and various other meditation practices. Control of one's breath leads to control of prana. In turn, control of prana implies control of one's mind. By regulating the flow of prana in the body one can tranquillize the mind and free it, at least for some time, of the incessant conflicts and thoughts that make higher awareness difficult. By manipulating prana in the psychic body one is able to make the mind a suitable vessel for meditation experience.

Pranayama is an indispensable tool. Meditation can be experienced without pranayama, but pranayama is the supercharger that makes meditation possible for most people. For verification of this let us refer to Ramana Maharshi. He said: "The principle underlying the system of yoga is that the source of thought on the one hand and of breath and vital forces on the other, is one and the same. In other words, the breath, vital forces, the physical body and even the mind are all no more than forms of prana or energy. Therefore, if any of them are effectively controlled then the other is automatically brought under control. Yoga aims at influencing the *manolaya* (subsistence of the mind) by means of the *pranalaya* (subsistence of the breath and vital forces), which is brought about by the practice of pranayama."

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

² For further details on the sushumna nadi refer to Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2.

For further details on ida and pingala nadis refer to Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1.

³ Topic 5 of this lesson.

Pranayama: Rules

The reader should abide by the following rules.

The posture for pranayama can be any comfortable sitting position, preferably on a blanket placed on the ground. The two meditative asanas, sukhasana and vajrasana are particularly suitable at this early stage¹. Later as your body becomes more supple we will introduce you to the best meditative asanas for pranayama practice – padmasana, siddhasana, etc.². Remember the body should be relaxed and the back kept straight without any strain.

The clothing worn should be as light and as loose as circumstances will permit. This is important so that the abdomen is allowed to expand unrestricted during deep inhalation. In particular don't wear any belts or corsets etc. Try to keep yourself warm during the practice. Though accentuated respiration generates increased body heat it is usually a good idea to wrap a blanket around yourself.

The place of practice should be clean, quiet and properly ventilated so that the air within the room is well-oxygenated and free of obnoxious smells. However, there should be no gale-force draught. The room should be free of all types of insects. If possible try to practise in the same place every day so that you gradually build up a quiet and conducive atmosphere for your daily yoga practices.

The best time for practice is early in the morning after asanas and before meditation. One should practise at least half an hour before taking food and four hours after food. For this reason before breakfast is a particularly suitable time. Pranayama can be performed at other times during the day but it is more difficult to meet all the restrictions. The evening is a reasonably good time to practise providing one can abide by the restrictions on food.

Concerning food, it is very difficult to practise pranayama correctly if the stomach and intestines are completely full. This prevents the contraction and expansion of the

abdomen during deep respiration. There is a saying by the ancient yogis: "Fill half your stomach with food, one quarter with water and the remaining quarter with air." In order to gain the most benefits from pranayama reasonable moderation in eating is essential.

It is best to empty the bowels as much as possible. Again this allows less restricted and greater movement of the abdomen during respiration.

Nasal blockage makes it very difficult to practise pranayama. One should definitely not breathe through the mouth unless a particular pranayama practice requires it. Therefore, jala neti should be done when necessary before beginning the practice³.

Awareness is an essential part of pranayama. It is important to be aware of the mechanics of the practice and not allow it to become automatic. If the mind becomes distracted, and it possibly will, don't become frustrated or try to suppress the wandering tendency; only try to realize that your attention is elsewhere. This is difficult, for when our attention is elsewhere we are normally so involved with the distraction we don't realize that we have ceased to be aware of the pranayama practice. All is forgotten, until some time later we realize our mind is not on the practice. Merely becoming aware of the distraction will direct our attention back to the mechanics of pranayama.

Violent respiration is not advocated during pranayama. Many people teach pranayama as though the lungs are a pair of heavy duty mechanical pumps. The lungs are strong but they are also sensitive and should be treated with respect. Respiration should be controlled and without any strain. If you have to use any excessive force or strain then you are not doing pranayama correctly. Beginners, in particular, should slowly and systematically develop more and more control over the respiratory functions. If one tries to master pranayama in a week by forceful inhalation, retention and

exhalation then more harm than good will result. The motto is 'slowly but surely'.

If there is any discomfort while doing pranayama then it should be stopped immediately. If this discomfort continues then seek the advice of a competent yoga teacher.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 2)

Nadi shodhana pranayama stage 1 should be continued¹, but now it can be supplemented by the second stage of nadi shodhana.

This practice is also commonly known as *sukha poorvaka* (simple preliminary practice) and *bhal bhati* (forehead bellows). In English this practice can be called the alternate nostril pranayama, for air is inhaled through one nostril and exhaled through the other.

The importance of equalizing the flow of air in the nostrils has already been fully discussed², and nadi shodhana stage 2 in particular helps to develop this desirable condition.

Scriptural references

This is an important practice and is mentioned in a large number of ancient yogic texts. The following from the *Gheranda Samhita* is the most direct reference: "Inhale through the ida (left nostril) and exhale through the pingala (right nostril). Then inhale through the pingala and exhale through the chandra (left nostril). The pooraka (inhalation) and the rechaka (exhalation) should be done without the slightest hurry. This practice will help to eliminate the problems of cough and cold." (57 & 58)

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 2

Sit in a comfortable sitting position; sukhasana or vajrasana are most suitable for this purpose, together with other meditative asanas that we will introduce later³.

Be calm and relax your whole body.

Hold your head and back upright but without straining.

Place your hands on your knees or in your lap. Close your eyes.

Be aware of your breath.

Set yourself the aim of totally involving yourself in the forthcoming practice.

After a minute or so begin the practice.

Lift your right hand in front of your face (or your left hand if preferred).

Adjust the fingers to form nasagra mudra¹.

Close the right nostril with the thumb.

Inhale through the left nostril.

Breathe as deeply as possible using the abdomen and chest to fill the lungs to the maximum.

Don't strain however; it must be a relaxed practice.

At the end of inhalation close the left nostril.

Open the right nostril and exhale.

The exhalation should be slow and the lungs emptied as much as possible.

At the end of exhalation keep the right nostril open and then slowly inhale.

After completing the full inhalation close the right nostril.

Open the left nostril and exhale.

This is 1 round.

Do a few more rounds in the same way maintaining awareness of the breath.

After a few rounds start to mentally count the time of inhalation and exhalation.

Each interval of counting should represent approximately 1 second: 1 (sec) – 2 (sec) – 3 (sec) – etc.

Try to keep the timing of the counting fixed; it is very easy to speed up the counting when one is short of breath.

Then adjust the duration of inhalation and exhalation according to the instructions given under the next heading.

Do not force the breath in any way.

Continue the practice for as long as time permits.

Be aware of the breath and the mental counting throughout the practice.

Duration of respiration

For the first stage of practice the duration of inhalation should equal the time of exhalation.

In other words if you breathe in for a count of five then you should also exhale for a count of five. However, begin with whatever count you find comfortable whether it is two or ten

or any other duration. No strain whatsoever should be involved in the practice. Over a period of weeks or months, however, slowly try to increase the duration of inhalation and exhalation, at the same time keeping them equal. For example, if you start with a duration of three seconds for inhalation and exhalation, try to increase this to four when you are able. This duration should be increased not only over the weeks of practice, but with each actual sitting. In other words start your practice with a comfortable duration, then after a short time you will automatically find that your breathing will last longer. Increase your counting and duration as much as is comfortable.

The relative duration of inhalation and exhalation will be changed for the next stage⁴.

Awareness and duration

Try to maintain full awareness of breathing and mental counting. This is important in order to reap the maximum benefits from pranayama. However, don't worry if your attention continually wanders. Just try to be aware that it is wandering and gently bring it back to the practice being performed.

Try to practise at least ten to fifteen minutes daily (this time also includes nadi shodhana stage 1).

Sequence

Nadi shodhana stage 2 should follow directly after stage 1. They should be done after asanas and before relaxation or meditation.

Precautions

At the slightest sign of discomfort reduce the duration of inhalation and exhalation. If necessary discontinue for the day. Make sure that you don't force in any way and that there is no haste whatsoever. It should be done as though you have all the time in the world.

Benefits

The benefits are the same as we have already described for nadi shodhana stage 1 so we will not repeat them here¹. However, nadi shodhana stage 2 is much more powerful and effective in balancing the air flow through the two nostrils. For this reason it is particularly useful before relaxational and meditation techniques. It develops a state of harmony in the individual so that he is neither too lethargic

nor too active, too dull or too excitable. The pranic currents or poles (sun and moon) are brought into balance with each other, thus increasing the health of the whole body-mind complex.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

² Topic 3 of this lesson.

³ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2.

⁴ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

Meditation: Practice

Though we have called the following technique a meditation practice it is really a continuation of the previous technique, which was intended to develop your awareness of the body¹. The subject of meditation will be fully discussed at a later stage². This practice, like all meditation techniques, is excellent for inducing deep relaxation. It can be used instead of shavasana³.

It is important to maintain full awareness throughout the practice. This is not so easy because one tends to fall asleep, or become involved in the continuous stream of thoughts that invade your perception. But whatever happens you must not create more tension by trying too hard or suppressing thoughts. Let them arise but be aware of them. Awareness of them is sufficient in itself to help redirect your attention back on to the practice.

Posture

One can either lie flat on the back in shavasana³, or sit in a meditation asana such as sukhasana or vajrasana⁴. It is easier to relax in the lying position, but it is also easier to fall asleep. Unless it is performed prior to sleep at night it is important to remain awake and aware. With practice a sitting position will become comfortable and there is less likelihood of falling asleep. However, the choice is left up to the practitioner.

If you sleep every time you do this practice then you should wash your face with cold water before starting and should certainly practise in a sitting position.

PRACTICE

Take a comfortable lying or sitting position. Cover yourself with a blanket if necessary. Relax your whole body and adjust yourself if you feel any discomfort. Close your eyes; for a minute or so be aware of your whole body.

Completely relax, but remain aware.

Then become aware of the heartbeat inside your chest.

Feel each beat pumping blood throughout the entire body.

Try to feel the whole body pulsating with each beat.

If you find this difficult don't worry; with practice it will become easier and easier.

The heart continues its duties without rest day and night throughout your life. We are rarely aware of it.

Now for a change become aware of this organ and realize that it never ceases its beating, pumping action.

Transfer your awareness to the pulse in the wrist of either arm.

Again this may be difficult at first but it will become easier with practice.

Soon you will hear the pulse and heartbeat like a drum being beaten.

Be aware of the pulse.

If you cannot feel the pulse don't worry.

Now try to simultaneously feel coordination between the heartbeat and the pulse and feel them occurring as one.

After some time try to feel the pulse in different parts of the body: the neck, the head, the legs, the abdomen and any other place you can think of.

At first this may be a little difficult, but it will definitely become easier if you persevere with your practice.

Eventually you will be able to become aware of the pulse in any part of the body at any time you wish.

Be aware of your body pulsating in harmony with your heartbeat.

Let this absorb your whole attention.

After some time be aware of your breath.

Feel the air entering the nostrils.

Taste the air. Imagine it is the first time you have ever breathed.

Respiration, like blood circulation, never stops.

However, because it is possible to consciously control breathing to a degree one is more often aware of it than of the heart and blood circulation.

Feel the air flowing in and out of your nostrils.

As you breathe in mentally count 1.

As you breathe out mentally count 2.

Continue counting in this way to a count of 40.

Your breathing should be natural; don't breathe deeply or slowly.

Throughout the practice maintain awareness of both the breathing and the mental counting. When you have counted 40 transfer your awareness to the throat.

Feel the air moving in and out of the throat. This might be a little difficult at first but try. When you can feel the breath moving in the throat then start to mentally count each inhalation and exhalation. Inhale – 1.

Exhale – 2. Inhale – 3 and so on.

Count to 40.

Be aware of the breath and the counting.

Now transfer your awareness to the chest.

As you breathe in feel the expansion of the ribcage.

Simultaneously feel that air is being drawn into the lungs.

As you breathe out feel the contraction of the ribcage.

Simultaneously feel the air being squeezed out of the lungs like air from a balloon.

Do this for a minute or so and then start to count each inhalation and each exhalation in the same way as previously explained.

Count up to 40 with continual awareness of the expansion and contraction of the chest and the feeling of air entering and leaving the lungs.

After this become aware of the abdomen.

Feel the rising and falling movement of the belly (the rectus abdominal muscles).

Breathe normally; don't try to force the breathing by making it deeper or slower if any effort is required.

Merely breathe as your body dictates.

As you breathe in try to feel the air being drawn into your body.

As you breathe out feel the unused waste products being expelled from the body.

When you are ready start to count the inhalations and exhalations as already explained.

Inhale – feel the expansion of the abdomen – mentally counting 1.

Exhale – feel the abdominal wall drop – count 2.

Continue in this same way up to the count of 40.

Be aware of the breath, abdominal movement and counting throughout.

When you have finished this slowly become aware of the surroundings.

Gently move your body and open your eyes. This is the end of the practice.

If you have managed to remain aware of all the different aspects of this practice then you should feel totally relaxed.

Duration and time of practice

This practice should take about ten minutes. It can be lengthened and shortened according to the time available simply by increasing or decreasing the number of times that you count the inhalation and exhalation.

It can be practised after asanas and pranayama in the morning or evening or at any other time during the day. We recommend it when you feel tired or tense. If you have any problem sleeping then you can do it before going to bed at night.

Instructions

This meditation is a reasonably long practice and it is very easy to fall asleep or lose track of the practice. If you have a friend who is also interested in yoga ask him or her to act as your yoga teacher using the instructions that we have given as a guide. Take it in turns to act as the instructor.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 6

² Meditation – An Introduction: Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 4.

Meditation – Rules for Practice: Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 5.

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

We have discussed a number of very useful practices in this lesson. This means that we are now much more able to map out a composite program with all the practices closely inter-related with each other.

In the following practice program (overleaf) Kunjal kriya is not included, for the individual must choose for himself how often it needs to be done. It can be performed either before or after your daily program of practices, together with jala neti¹.

There is no pranayama included in the fifteen minute program. This has been omitted due to lack of time. However, pranayama is an essential part of yoga sadhana and should ideally be practised for at least half an hour daily. This may necessitate getting out of bed a few minutes earlier in the morning, but the benefits you will gain will make this more than worthwhile.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Simha Kriya	—	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Bhujangasana or Sphinx pose	—	3
Supta Pawanmuktasana	3 each stage	5
Sarpasana	3	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	7
Stage 2	—	7
Meditation practice	—	10
		60

Program 2: duration ½ hour

Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Sarpasana	2	2
Marjari-asana	15	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each side	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	5
Stage 2	—	5

Try to find the time for the meditation practices in order to make your daily practice program complete. 30

Program 3: duration ¼ hour

Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Sarpasana	2	2
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
		15

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Lesson 5

What is yoga?

Yoga is a system of living with sense and science, of the realization of ultimate values and altruistic missions of life.

Yoga evolves a harmonious order in mind, matter and man.

Yoga is an absolute departure from basic animal tendencies.

Yoga is a state of aloofness from the artificialities of life and relationship.

Yoga is the culture of tomorrow.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

What is Yoga?

So far in this book we have primarily concerned ourselves with describing the basic rules of asanas, pranayama and relaxation techniques, yet there are many other varied aspects of yoga. The reason behind this was to enable you to practise yoga from the outset. The purpose of this new series of discussions, of which this is the first, is to explain what yoga is all about – how it relates to you, to everyday life, how the structure of yoga is formed, its different paths and how these paths interrelate to achieve the culmination of yoga¹.

Actually, it is impossible to really appreciate the aims of yoga, at least the higher ones, without personal experience. All we can do is to broadly indicate the direction in which yoga can take you, if not its destination. For example, it is possible to indicate on a map the route to a specific town and even describe the layout of the area. Yet at the same time it is impossible for anyone else to experience the journey or to know the town for you. You must do it for yourself. It is the same with yoga. We can indicate the path, the signposts and make inadequate attempts to explain the higher aims, but for the personal experiences you must tread the path yourself. And this is the essence of yoga – neither descriptions, nor theories, nor suppositions, but direct personal experience.

In this topic we will discuss mainly the meaning of yoga, giving an outline of its origin and development through the ages.

Definition

Yoga is usually defined as union: union between the limited self (*jiva*) and the cosmic self (*atman*). Without trying to confuse things any further, we would like to point out that there is an anomaly in this definition. For there to be an aim or goal of union there must first be a state of separation. And in fact this separation does not exist. At this very moment you are united with the cosmic consciousness. Even

this statement is not true, for you actually are the cosmic consciousness. So the aim of yoga is not really to unite you with anything, for you are already united. It is to make you realize your identity with the greater Self, to make you know and tune in with your existing inner nature. Yoga is so called (i.e. union) because it is seen and defined in terms of everyday normal life, where each person feels separation from, or does not comprehend the possibility of a higher being. In other words, yoga is seen as union from the point of view of personal identity. At a higher level of awareness there is no separation or any distinction between the so-called individual and consciousness. It is our low level of awareness that clouds the issue and prevents us realizing this identification. There is a beautiful and often quoted Indian story illustrating this point. The general theme is that there is a large elephant being held at different parts of its body by a number of blind men. Each of the blind men in turn attempts to describe the elephant. One holds the tail and says: "The elephant is just like a snake." The second man holds one of the legs and cries: "No, the elephant is like a large pillar." "You're both wrong," says the third man who was holding one ear, "the elephant is exactly like a big fan." The fourth man, who was running his hands along one of the tusks, shrugged his shoulders declaring: "This elephant doesn't resemble in any way the descriptions you have given; it is like a horn." "You're all crazy," said the fifth man who was pulling the trunk, "the best description of an elephant is that it is like the trunk of a banana tree." These five men saw the one elephant in different ways. The elephant itself did not change, and had the blind men been blessed with eyesight they would have seen the reason for the differing descriptions; they would have realized that they were talking about different aspects of the one thing. This is the same conception that most of us have regarding our identity. We see

separation; we see ourselves as distinct from our surroundings and other people, because we are really like the blind men, not seeing or knowing ourselves and our environment as they really are.

In review, we can say that yoga is not really union. It is in fact realization of the union already existing. This is the culmination of yoga. At the same time yoga as it is usually known and understood is the method or path which one adopts to attain the realization of yoga, of one's true identity. Thus yoga has a double meaning; it encompasses both the method and the end point. The meaning of yoga can also be denoted by the words unity and oneness; for the practice of yoga aims at rooting out the ego, this being the aspect of our individuality that enhances the sense of separation from our surroundings. Once the ego is transcended, the individual becomes himself and realizes his real, inner nature.

The definition of yoga that we have just given is a purely spiritual one. There are many other definitions which apply to all the levels of existence and awareness. For example, at the physical level most people have a body that is continually in a state of disruption. The functions of the different organs, muscles and nerves no longer harmonize and assist each other. Instead, they often hamper and act in opposition. For instance, the endocrine system becomes irregular; the efficiency of the nervous system decreases with the result that disease manifests in one form or another. Yoga aims at bringing all these different functions into perfect coordination, so that they work for the overall good of the body. So we can say another definition of yoga is physical harmony and health.

Many people suffer mental disturbances in the form of conflicts, neuroses, phobias and so on which make them unhappy and depressed in life. Yoga aims to smooth out and eliminate all mental problems, both large and small, obvious and subtle. Yoga can also be defined as mental balance and mental peace. Yet another definition of yoga is coordination and harmony between mind and body, so that our body responds perfectly to our mental commands, conscious and subconscious. This was very succinctly explained by Swami Sivananda when he said that: "Yoga is integration and harmony between thoughts, words

and deeds, or integration between head, heart and hands."

From the harmony of the mental and physical aspects of man (including of course the pranic or bioplasmic body and our emotional nature) are derived other positive virtues as by-products. From these arise many other definitions of yoga. The following are a selection taken from the classical yoga text, the *Bhagavad Gita*:

Yoga is equanimity in success and failure (2:48)

Yoga is skill and efficiency in action (2:50)

Yoga is the supreme secret of life (4:3)

Yoga is the giver of untold happiness (5:2)

Yoga is serenity (6:3)

Yoga is the destroyer of pain. (6:17)

Although there are other definitions in the *Bhagavad Gita* these few are the main ones.

Sage Patanjali, writer of the classical yogic text, the *Yoga Sutras*, defines yoga as: "... complete control over the different patterns or modifications of consciousness." In other words, yoga implies control over the conscious, unconscious and superconscious realms of our being. One becomes the observer of these different higher states attaining complete knowledge of them.

Yoga can be defined as a science for developing creativity; as the science for unfolding the deeper aspects of the personality; as the science of being; as the science of consciousness. Actually, the definition of yoga will be perhaps a little different for each practitioner, for the individual will relate to yogic experiences and hence explain them in different ways. One thing is certain, whatever definition of yoga is chosen, the implications on one's life are vast, for yoga concerns itself with the very core of our lives: body, mind and consciousness. With this in mind, we leave the reader to work out his own definition of yoga through personal experience.

The origin and development of yoga

The origin of yoga lies hidden in the mists of pre-history. It was slowly evolved and developed by the ancient sages, not only in India but all over the world. However, it has been modified to suit regional languages, social ideas and so on. The essence of yoga was wrapped up in or explained in different symbols, analogies and languages. Some traditions believe that yoga was a divine gift revealed to the ancient sages

so that mankind could have the opportunity to realize its divine nature.

Generally the techniques of yoga were passed on from teacher or guru to their disciples by word of mouth. In this way there was a clear understanding of the meaning of the techniques and aims of yoga, for the guru, through his personal experience, could guide the students along the right path and away from any confusion and misunderstanding. In fact, it was only when the various systems of yoga were written down that people began to see contradictions in the teachings. However, these discrepancies are only superficial and arise through misinterpretation. The writers of the classical texts cannot be blamed, for they recorded their ideas on yoga as clearly as possible in order to avoid misinterpretation. They expounded their ideas with the minimum amount of words so that people would not lose themselves in trying to understand or intellectualize about word meanings, or in other cases they clothed their writings in symbolism and analogies. This was done so that only a person prepared and ready for a teaching would be able to understand the symbolism, if necessary with the help of a guru. However, even though these precautions were taken, many misunderstandings arose, mainly among overly verbose and intellectual scholars who did not have the personal experience to support their commentaries. Unfortunately people have listened to the commentators without resorting to the original texts and the advice of people more in touch with the spirit of yoga. The result has been confusion, and as a consequence many well-intentioned people have performed the most bizarre acts in the name of yoga. Some often quoted examples are walking on fire, sitting in the midday sun and torturing the body in a variety of ways, such as standing on one leg in one place for months on end. The list is endless and could almost be laughable except for the fact that many of these misguided people were so intent and confident in their minds that these are the methods to higher awareness.

The yoga that we now know, that which developed in India, was used, at least in its rudimentary form, more than five thousand years ago. In archaeological excavations made in the Indus valley at Harappa and Mohanjodaro in what is now Pakistan, various

statues have been unearthed depicting people practising yoga. They show Lord Shiva (the mythological originator of yoga) and his wife Parvati sitting in various asanas and practising meditation. These ruins were once the dwelling places of people who lived in the so-called pre-vedic age. These discoveries are a definite indicator that yoga was practised in India even before the Aryan civilization invaded and started to flourish in the Indus subcontinent.

The first books to mention yoga were the ancient Vedas. Though scholars are not positive, it is generally felt that these books were written at least four thousand, five hundred years ago. They don't give any specific yogic practices, however, but generally allude to yoga in symbolic form – in fact the verses of the Vedas were uttered by rishis or yogis in states of spiritual bliss and knowledge (*samadhi*). It is for this reason that the Vedas are regarded as revealed scriptures – the rishis did not compose the verses but acted in a sense as transmitters through which these revelations were expounded. The Vedas are regarded as the first yogic texts, for they illustrate, even in an indirect manner, the essence of yoga. The word yoga is mentioned in various places in the Vedas, particularly the *Rig Veda*, but it is generally a vague reference to the meaning of yoga in relation to something else, such as harnessing horses together for example. Of course the terms are symbolic, but one would learn little of yoga as it is understood today by reading the Vedas. Many aspects of yoga are mentioned, such as *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation) and so on, though in little detail. The Self or consciousness was fully understood as being something beyond the body and mind and yet to be realized within. This is not, however, surprising in view of the fact that the inspiration behind the Vedas is from highly evolved yogis. This higher knowledge transcends all national and language barriers. It is something that has been realized by persons in every part of the world and at every period of history. The seers of the Vedas clearly recognized that there existed a dynamic life principle which they called *vayu* (prana). They also clearly saw that this prana was closely related to breathing. The Vedas also briefly mention the existence of pranic centres (*chakras*) within but not of

the physical body. The science of sound was clearly recognized for they mention various mantras (psychic sounds) that can be used for the attainment of both material or worldly goals as well as spiritual aims. In this sense they were probably more advanced than the people of today in the science of mantras, for it is only recently that people have begun to understand the power of sound.

In conclusion we can say that the concept of yoga was known in vedic times in one form or another, as it had been for many thousands of years before. This is not surprising, for there have always been people who have aspired and attempted to tune in with higher consciousness and to transcend their limited individuality. However, in all probability the system of yoga was not properly formulated before and during the time of the recording of the Vedas. The experiences of yoga were known but the science of yoga had yet to be systematized.

It is with the advent of the Brahmanas and Upanishads that we begin to see yoga take shape and assume the form that it has today. The Brahmanas are texts which deal mainly with sacrificial and ritualistic practices, though there is a wealth of knowledge and historical information contained within its pages. They mention *japa* (meditative techniques involving chanting of mantras) and *mouna* (another technique for inducing meditation, which can be translated as 'inner silence') as being two important aspects of yoga². In these texts the universal mantra *Aum* is mentioned in written form for the first time, together with its significance. The foundations for the later development of the science of swara yoga (study of the breath and flow of psychic currents and relationship with life) were also laid down, which later led to the classical swara text called *Shiva Swarodaya*. The development of psychic powers through yoga are also mentioned in the Brahmanas, such as the ability to read other people's thoughts.

It is the Upanishads, however, which put yoga on a firmer foundation. It is in these varied texts that we start to see yoga assume a more definite shape. The Sanskrit word Upanishad is made up from the words *shad*, 'to sit', *upa*, 'near' and *ni*, 'learn'. The whole word can be interpreted to mean sit down near and receive teachings from a master.

The word *upanishad* can also be interpreted as secret teaching. There are believed to have been about two hundred different Upanishads, the oldest of which was written somewhere around 600 BC and the most recent as late as the fifteenth century AD. Traditionally, one hundred and eight of these Upanishads are regarded as authentic, and of these only about twelve or thirteen are regarded as being authoritative. The major Upanishads are the *Isha*, *Kena*, *Katha*, *Prashna*, *Mundaka*, *Mandukya*, *Taittiriya*, *Aitareya*, *Chhandogya*, *Swetasvatara* and *Brihadaranyaka*. They vary enormously in their contents – the *Mandukya* is the smallest with a mere twelve verses while the *Brihadaranyaka* and *Chhandogya* each contain a few thousand words. The Upanishads are also known as the Vedanta – the culmination of the Vedas, for they are said to contain the essence of the Vedas.

The essential message of the Upanishads is that the Self can only be known through union (yoga) and certainly not by mere speculation and learning. Furthermore, it is emphasized again and again that the Self is not to be realized outside; it is not something separate, but at the very core of our being. The Upanishads use words as a means and not as an end. When asked to define the Self, or consciousness, one of the sages gave the wonderful but very unintellectual or allogical reply: '*neti-neti*', which means 'not this, not this'. The Upanishads don't paint a completely rosy picture of the yogic path – effort is required. For as the *Katha Upanishad* says, the path is as narrow as the razor's edge. There is a similar saying from another great yogi and spiritual teacher, Christ, who said: "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life (self-realization)."

Many of the Upanishads try to describe the highest spiritual experiences and the illumination or knowledge that they received. To this end they use analogies, stories and sometimes beautiful poetry. Other Upanishads are more practical and describe mental attitudes that must be cultivated and adopted in order to both begin and make progress on the yogic path. Others make brief statements regarding methods that can be practised in order to induce meditation. Many other topics are also discussed.

The Upanishads are numerous and the subjects that they cover too diversified for

there to be any full treatment of their contents here. However, we can give a brief summary of the scope of their teachings.

Many of the Upanishads devote much space to describing prana and its implications. The earlier Upanishads – the *Brihadaranyaka*, *Chhandogya*, *Taittiriya*, etc., were fully aware of the fact that prana is the substratum behind all life forms. They describe the psychic pathways which exist within, but not of the physical body, through which prana flows, including the all important nadis, ida, pingala and sushumna³. In the later Upanishads such as the *Prashna* and the *Katha* this theme was further developed. The different forms of prana within the body were mapped out according to the functions performed and it is stated that there are seventy two thousand nadis or pranic channels within the body. The concept of the *kundalini* (psychic and spiritual power) in the form of a serpent within the body is also indicated.

The early Upanishads, such as the *Kena* and *Isha*, began to indirectly develop and formulate the precepts of karma yoga, though it is left to the later *Bhagavad Gita* to fully expound the essence of karma yoga. It is these Upanishads that first indicate the possibility of treading the yogic path and reaching the culmination while performing one's everyday duties. Until this time there was a tendency to see the yogic and spiritual paths as being completely separate and divorced from worldly pursuits.

Various Upanishads, such as the *Prashna* and *Katha*, deal quite extensively with the mantra Aum. In fact the *Mandukya* devotes its entire commentary to this topic and nothing else. These texts again and again emphasize that meditation can be most easily induced by concentration on Aum. The *Mundaka Upanishad* considers Aum as a bow, the individual self as an arrow and Brahman or the Self as the target. If the arrow is aimed with full concentration, then there is no doubt that it will pierce and merge with the target. So it is with Aum that one can attain the highest states of meditation.

The early Upanishads lay down some of the basic rules of raja yoga which were later fully systematized and expounded by Sage Patanjali. In fact, various useful suggestions are mentioned such as the following two examples: "With the body, head and neck held upright,

direct your awareness to the heart region; and then Aum will be your boat to cross the river of fear." (*Swetasvarara Upanishad*)

In fact this is the first time that a sitting pose suitable for meditation practice was specified in a scriptural text. "The supreme path begins when the five senses and the mind are stilled and when the intellect is silent. This tranquillity of the senses is yoga." (*Katha Upanishad*)

This clearly defines the meaning of the fifth state of raja yoga, *pratyahara*, where a person's awareness is withdrawn from the external world and the sense organs. In fact, this all important stage is preliminary to the attainment of meditation through raja yoga techniques and is elucidated again and again in the Upanishads.

We have only mentioned some of the earliest Upanishads, and the ones that are regarded as being the most important. There is a goldmine of information on other aspects of yoga in the texts we have mentioned, as well as the large number of so-called minor Upanishads. For example, the *Yoga Chudamani* covers a wide range of practical aspects of yoga ranging from asanas and pranayama to psychic centres and self-realization. It also deals with some yogic practices that are part of kriya yoga, though not in much detail. The other Upanishads are also a source of many practical and theoretical principles of yoga. However, the only thing that the Upanishads lack is a systematic treatment and summary of the paths of yoga; they are a conglomeration of profound ideas mixed with various other kinds of information. In fact, we can say that the Upanishads are intended more to inspire than to instruct. During the era of the writing of the Upanishads, right up until quite recently, instructions on practical yoga were always imparted personally by a guru. The writers knew this and so detailed techniques were not recorded. This was left to the discretion of the guru and to later yogic texts.

Though they don't explain yogic practices in any depth, the joy of higher awareness shines through the Upanishads as clearly as the midday sun. They tackle sublime questions of existence with the utmost simplicity and directness. The answers they give are revelations in themselves. The Upanishads are such that they can be read by any person in the world with at least some kind of comprehension and

empathy, without becoming lost in a haze of over-intellectualization as is so easy with many other scriptures. They are meant to simplify not to complicate.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* are the two vast epics which were written about three thousand five hundred years ago, a little before the time of Buddha. The *Mahabharata* can be roughly translated using a little imagination as 'The Great Book of Indian Culture' and the *Ramayana* as 'The Path of Rama'. The *Mahabharata* contains well over one hundred thousand verses and the *Ramayana*, though smaller, is still sufficiently bulky to call it more an encyclopaedia than a book. We only intend to give a cursory glance at their contents, for while they propound yoga, they are mainly wrapped in symbolism and stories. Though these two books are works of art in themselves, they don't in the main give a systematic treatment of yoga, apart from the *Bhagavad Gita*, which we will discuss shortly.

The *Ramayana* is a particularly popular scripture even today in India. It portrays the life of Rama in poetry of unsurpassed beauty, which is often sung to the accompaniment of music. Though it contains little or no direct instructions on yoga, it conveys in symbolic form the essence of yogic life and the path that must be undertaken in order to attain self-realization. Superficially it deals with the life of Rama, his wife Sita, various other people and the tribulations that they face during life. But in fact, hidden under this thin disguise is a description of the trials and challenges that a yogi must face, both internally and externally, on the path to transcendental awareness.

Another spiritual text called the *Yoga Vasishtha* is regarded as a direct offshoot and continuation of the *Ramayana*. This too is a compendium of spiritual inspiration and notable for the depth of its scientific and spiritual ideas. Many scientific ideas only recently promulgated are clearly written in this treatise. The text attempts to explain all aspects of creation and link them ultimately to consciousness. All aspects of life are discussed, from health and disease to happiness and misery. It discusses various methods to attain spiritual realization and emphasizes time and time again the importance of direct perception and experience as opposed to second-hand knowledge. It speaks of various yogic paths,

in particular the path of meditation and jnana. Pranayama is also recommended as a method of controlling the mind and inducing meditation. It is not, however, a book to be read by beginners of yoga, for although it is a goldmine of knowledge and beautiful poetry, it does not map out in any detail the path to be taken. It is essentially devoid of practical aspects of yoga and is really intended for people who already have a knowledge of yogic techniques and have had higher experiences.

The *Mahabharata* contains many passages which directly relate to yoga interposed in its main theme – the military struggles during a certain period of Indian history. However, the essence of its teachings is contained in the world famous section called the *Bhagavad Gita*. It is a poem of seven hundred verses in which Arjuna, a great warrior, is instructed in the practice of yoga by Krishna, incarnation of God, who assumes the role of charioteer during the main battle of the epic. Though its text can be easily seen as contradictory by over-intellectual analysis or an over-literal interpretation, it has been and still is a source of inspiration and guidance to those following the path of yoga. As one makes progress along the yogic path, so one sees more and more layers of wisdom emerge from its pages; it continually unfolds higher and higher levels of meaning. The apparent contradictions and anomalies slowly fade and one begins to realize what a wonderful text it really is.

The *Bhagavad Gita* is a yogic scripture par excellence, and is applicable to people throughout the world and in every walk of life. It maps out in concise, but specific manner, the yogic paths of *karma yoga* (the path of action), *jnana yoga* (the path of intuition), *bhakti yoga* (the path of devotion) and *dhyana yoga* (the path of meditation). In fact, with regard to karma yoga it can be considered the supreme treatise.

It is in the *Bhagavad Gita* where we really see that yoga is for everyone and not for the recluse. Before the writing of this text there was a tendency to regard yoga as unworldly and unconnected with daily life. It is the *Bhagavad Gita* that urges everyone to start practising yoga here and now, and not to consider it something to be practised on retirement from one's responsibilities or some time in the future when the opportunity

presents itself. It is to be practised now as an integral part of one's life. Another important aspect of the *Bhagavad Gita* is that it blends all the different aspects of yoga into a comprehensive whole. With the practice of yoga there should not be confinement to one path. In fact this is impossible. Integration of all the different paths is necessary. Though a person might follow one path in particular, the other paths should also be practised where possible. The Gita makes this point very clear. Before the time of writing the Gita, there was a tendency to see separation between the different paths and even to consider some of the paths as mutually exclusive. It is the Gita that formulates the basic structure of the science of yoga as it is known today.

So far we have mainly concerned ourselves with the development of literature on yoga. This must be the case, for we only know with certainty the direction of yogic development by reference to the ancient texts. At the same time, however, yoga was simultaneously being refined and developed by its practitioners and gurus, who then passed on their teachings by word of mouth. In fact, it is certainly these people who evolved and improvised yoga practices by their personal experience in an endeavour to achieve the best results. All the texts can do is to reflect current and prevalent ideas.

Since the teachings of yoga were generally passed on orally, its development was haphazard. Different teachers taught different methods so that before it was systematized, yoga was a collection of varied and unrelated techniques, riddled with all types of personal beliefs and superstitions. It is here that the writers of the ancient texts served their greatest purpose by bringing all these different ideas together and integrating them. One of the most successful of these writers was Sage Patanjali who wrote the text called the *Yoga Sutras* some time before the birth of Christ. This is still regarded as the classical and authoritative book on raja yoga. In a mere one hundred and ninety six verses, Sage Patanjali has considered the essential philosophy, background, techniques and attainments of raja yoga. In a sense, it can be said that he is the compiler more than the writer, for he took all the important existing practices which were used for many centuries up until his time

and united them into one comprehensive and harmonious system. He certainly did not invent the path of raja yoga for its constituents were known in essence since the beginning of the vedic period thousands of years before.

The whole subject of raja yoga is treated in a most scientific manner starting from moral precepts, leading on to the physical and mental aspects and finally self-realization. Some of Sage Patanjali's terse comments on the mind are far ahead even of modern day psychological ideas. In fact the modern trend in psychology is towards adaptation and implementation of the ancient ideas of yoga, particularly those propounded by Sage Patanjali.

The essential foundations of yoga as we now know it were laid down by the time Sage Patanjali had finished writing his *Yoga Sutras*. Many more texts and developments were to follow, but the structure of yoga was outlined; all that was required was the filling in of the empty spaces. This was done mainly by large numbers of commentators who interpreted and reinterpreted the traditional texts. Often this caused more confusion than clarity, because many differing commentaries arose resulting in controversy and speculation. Nevertheless a few of these scholars did throw some light on the traditional yogic texts. An example is Shankaracharya, who personally interpreted twelve different Upanishads, and the *Bhagavad Gita*, as well as writing many original books on yoga such as *Viveka Chudamani* (Crest Jewel of Wisdom), *Aparokshanubhuti* (Direct Experience of Reality) and the *Atma-bodha* (Knowledge of the Self). These treatises are masterpieces in themselves. Shankaracharya was a man who had extensively practised yoga for himself and knew through personal experience the significance of yoga. He was not content, as were so many others, to merely analyze intellectually the science of yoga without personal experience.

There are many other contributors to the development of yoga who we have yet to mention. Bhakti yoga, though practised throughout the eras of yoga, was given a particularly strong boost in the middle ages by such bhakti yogis as Kabir, Tulsidas, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Nam Dev and many more. They all wrote wonderful poetry which even now inflames the heart with its devotional feeling. People such as Kabir not only expres-

sed their intense love in their poetry, but also interspersed it with clear practical advice on the path of bhakti yoga and other paths.

Large numbers of hatha yoga texts were written throughout the ages. The most well-known of these are the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Shiva Samhita*, the *Gheranda Samhita* and many more. These texts give details on asanas, pranayama and other hatha yoga practices, together with techniques for performing mudras, bandhas, etc. However, all the books emphasize that the hatha yoga practices are not specifically aimed at making the body healthy. They are a means to higher ideals, which first demand a healthy body. There are many sages and yogis who have contributed to the growth of yoga, such as the ancient yogis Gorakhnath, Matsyendranath, Janaka, Yajnavalkya, Ashtavakra, Vyasa and so many others, as well as the yogis of recent times such as Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Sivananda and our guru Swami Satyananda. The list is endless. The number of books on yoga runs into the thousands. For example, the *Ashtavakra Gita* is a sublime text containing the utterances of yogis in advanced states of meditation; the *Anu Gita* of the *Mahabharata*, which is said to be a further explanation of the *Bhagavad Gita* by Krishna to Arjuna, his disciple; the *Brahma Sutras*, which attempt to consolidate in a condensed form the essence of the Upanishads; the *Vyasabhasya* which gives a masterly commentary on Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*; Narada's *Bhakti Sutras*, which gives rules for practising bhakti yoga, and so on. And this list grows with every year that passes.

We have only given a brief glimpse of the origin and development of yoga. There is much more to be said, but there is no space, for many volumes would be required and besides, those who are sincerely interested in the history and literature of yoga can take the steps to find out for themselves. For those who want to tread the yogic path, such a deep knowledge is not necessary. The books that we have mentioned contain the essence of yoga and can easily be obtained by anyone who wants to investigate the original yogic texts. However, for personal growth through yoga it is not necessary to read any of these books, for yoga is one hundred percent practice. These techniques are widely available in modern

books on yoga, in ashrams and yoga schools and can be learnt from a competent guru, which is the best way.

Notes

¹ For further information refer to The Structure of Yoga – Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 1

² Japa – Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5
Mouna – Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3

Surya Namaskara

The Sanskrit word *surya* means 'sun', and the word *namaskara* means 'salutation' or 'worship'. Therefore, this practice is known as 'salutation to the sun'. Surya namaskara is a dynamic exercise. It is neither an asana nor a part of traditional yoga. But because it is such a wonderful practice we have incorporated it into the yoga techniques that we teach.

We always recommend practitioners to include it as an essential and integral part of their yoga program. It revitalizes the whole body, removes all signs of sleep and is excellent for preparing the body and mind so that maximum benefits can be derived from the subsequent asanas, pranayama, meditation practices and so on. It loosens up all the joints, flexes all the muscles of the body, massages the internal organs, activates the respiratory and circulatory systems as well as helps to tone all the other systems of the body. In short, it harmonizes the whole body-mind complex.

It can be practised at almost any time of the day and in any place. No special preparations are necessary. If you feel tired during the day, a few rounds of surya namaskara will quickly restore the lost vitality, both physically and mentally. If you feel angry or depressed, surya namaskara is an excellent antidote; not a panacea, but a great help in removing emotional disturbances. It is a rhythmical, symmetrical exercise which is really a pleasure to perform. When it is perfected, the body almost appears to flow through the different movements without any effort or conscious will. Each part of the body seems to move automatically into the right position at the right time and in the right sequence without any effort. If you try it for yourself you will know what we mean.

Symbolic and spiritual significance

The sun has been adored since time immemorial. The ancient people worshipped the sun with awe, knowing that the sun generates

the heat and light necessary to sustain life. They knew that without it there would be no life and no movement. If the sun ceased to exist then life would be snuffed out like the flame of a candle.

Most of the ancient civilizations developed religions which were based on sun worship. It was personified by various deities: Mithras of the Persians, Osiris of the Egyptians, Baal of the Chaldeans, Apollo of the Greeks, Surya, the Lord of the heavens in the vedic period of India and so on. All these deities represent rejuvenation of the world's existence. Various temples and a variety of places were consecrated for the worship of the sun: the pyramids of Egypt, the Yucatan of Mexico, the Ziggurats of Babylonia and Chaldea. It is from these ancient cults that much of the background, rites and symbolism of modern religions have come, but hidden under many different guises and interpretations.

Let us consider the Hindu trinity – Brahma the creator, Vishnu the sustainer and Shiva the destroyer. These symbolize three aspects of life and are directly related to the daily movement of the sun. The passage of the sun can be divided into three phases – the rising, the midday and the setting phase. In time these came to represent the three aspects of life – growth or creation, sustenance or maturity and death, destruction or decay. Thus evolved Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. Brahma, the creator, is symbolized by the dawn, the time when things come alive and the daytime cycle starts again. Vishnu the sustainer, is symbolized by the daytime sun which radiates energy into the world allowing things to grow and live. Shiva, the destroyer, is symbolized by the setting sun, which takes with it the energy vibrations of the sun. Yet this disappearance of the sun is only a prelude to its resurrection the following morning. Sunset is necessary for the sun to rise again; decay is necessary for growth, replenishment and rejuvenation, in the

same way as destruction of previous concepts is necessary for spiritual growth.

The sun was not only worshipped because of its material nature and power, though it might well have been by less informed persons. The sun itself is a symbol. It symbolizes spiritual illumination and knowledge, the light in the darkness of ignorance. It represents the essence, the spirituality which exists in all material things. It is this essence which is worshipped by the more enlightened people of the ancient cults and religions. The material sun is the manifestation of the deeper, hidden background or substratum. This has been clearly explained by Paracelsus, the medieval alchemist, as follows: "There is an earthly, material sun, which is the cause of heat; and all who are capable of seeing it, even those who are blind, can feel his heat. And then there is an eternal sun, which is the source of wisdom; and those who are spiritually awakened will see this sun and be conscious of His existence."

The material or terrestrial sun is the manifestation of the invisible, spiritual and celestial sun. The spiritual sun represents the spiritual aspects of existence, and from it the material sun of material aspects of life is derived. Therefore, it is the spiritual sun that is regarded as the source of power and inner light but because the material sun can be seen by all, it is this aspect that is seemingly worshipped.

The yearly cycle of the sun was regarded by many ancient cults and religions as symbolic of the life of man, and in fact of all living things. The birth date of the sun took place three days after its winter solstice. This is because the sun was regarded as dying on its winter solstice (i.e. 22nd December). At this time its power, the intensity of its rays is the lowest (in the northern hemisphere). Three days later (25th December) the sun could be easily and distinctively seen to start to grow stronger and the days start to become longer. This symbolizes the rebirth of life, but more importantly, it symbolizes rebirth into spiritual consciousness. This date was important in many ancient cults, and still is in many religions today.

The sun is a symbol of immortality, for while it died every evening, it was reborn the following morning. The rising of the sun is a time for joy and wonder, for it raises all things from the dead. It restores life again. It is for this reason that surya namaskara was evolved in ancient

India. It is mentioned in the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas*, ancient scriptures of India, where various prostrations are prescribed for worship of the sun. However, at that time it did not have the form it has now. It consisted of various static poses combined with mantras. It was not the dynamic exercise that we know today. It is only recently that the individual static poses were combined to form the coordinated exercise that we will describe in this topic.

Many people still worship the sun in one form or another. You can treat surya namaskara as an expression of your regard for the sun, whether it is the material aspect or that underlying spiritual aspect that the material sun symbolizes. Or, if you are not inclined to worship, then do surya namaskara for the sake of maintaining and inducing good health. This is the stepping stone to spiritual awareness and peace.

Basic features

Surya namaskara consists of five essential aspects. All of them must be done to gain the optimum results from the practice. These aspects are as follows:

1. *Physical postures*: there are twelve physical postures which correspond to the signs of the zodiac. During the sun's apparent journey through the heavens it passes through each of these celestial houses in turn. It remains in each zodiac for about thirty days and is said to triumph over each sign as it enters its domain. Each position in surya namaskara corresponds to one of these signs of the zodiac.

2. *Breathing*: the whole movement of surya namaskara from start to finish is synchronized with breathing. Each position is associated with either inhalation, exhalation or retention of breath. Nothing is forced or unnatural, for the breathing corresponds to the pattern one would normally do in relation to the physical movement. Correct automatic breathing should occur naturally without any prior instructions. However, details of the correct relationship between movement and breath are given to ensure it is done perfectly, for it is an important part of the practice. Without synchronization between the breath and the movement many of the benefits of surya namaskara are missed.

3. *Mantras*: associated with each of the twelve positions of surya namaskara is a specific

mantra. A *mantra* is a combination of syllables, sounds or phrases, realized by ancient sages, which have been widely known in India for thousands of years. They are evocative sounds and through their power of vibration have subtle, yet powerful and penetrating effects on the mind and body. While doing surya namaskara, a particular mantra is repeated either silently or uttered aloud with each position. When surya namaskara is combined with correct breathing and these *bija mantras* (seed sounds), the entire mind and intellect are energized. These *bija mantras* create a vibration and it is this which creates the energy. Mantras may or may not have specific meanings, but the vibrations which they create should reach every fibre of one's being. The mantras of surya namaskara are energized sound. When repeated loudly, clearly and with devotion, these mantras give the greatest possible benefits to those who utter them, either in hastening the curing of an ailment, acquiring stability of mind and self-control, or dissolving tensions caused by modern living.

The *bija* or seed mantras are:

1. *Om hram*
2. *Om hrim*
3. *Om hrum*
4. *Om hraim*
5. *Om hraum*
6. *Om hrah*

The full mantras, one for each movement of the exercise are:

1. *Om Hram Mitraya Namah*
2. *Om Hrim Ravaye Namah*
3. *Om Hrum Suryaya Namah*
4. *Om Hraim Bhanave Namah*
5. *Om Hraum Khagaya Namah*
6. *Om Hrah Pushne Namah*
7. *Om Hram Hiranyagarbhaya Namah*
8. *Om Hrim Marichaye Namah*
9. *Om Hrum Adityaya Namah*
10. *Om Hraim Savitre Namah*
11. *Om Hraum Arkaya Namah*
12. *Om Hrah Bhaskaraya Namah*

The meanings of these names of the sun are as follows:

1. *Mitra* – friend
2. *Ravi* – shining
3. *Surya* – beautiful light
4. *Bhanu* – brilliant
5. *Khaga* – who moves in the sky
6. *Pushan* – giver of strength

7. *Hiranyagarbha* – golden centred

8. *Marichi* – lord of the dawn

9. *Aditya* – son of Aditi

10. *Savita* – beneficent

11. *Arka* – energy

12. *Bhaskara* – leading to enlightenment

However, before you attempt to integrate these mantras with each position we strongly advise that you first perfect the physical movements and synchronization of breath in surya namaskara to gain the maximum benefits.

4. *Awareness*: this is an essential element of surya namaskara. Without awareness the many beneficial results are reduced.

5. *Relaxation*: this is not strictly a part of surya namaskara. However, it is a necessary supplementary practice that should be done without fail on completing your rounds. Any relaxation technique can be adopted, but the best method is shavasana¹.

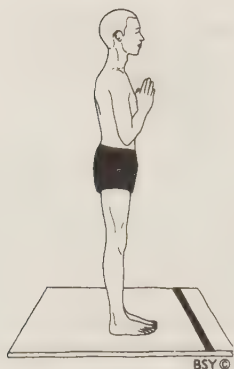
Sequence for learning surya namaskara

You should first familiarize yourself with the twelve postures. In the initial stage only be concerned with mastering the sequence of the physical movements, paying little or no heed to the breathing or mantra repetition. Eventually you will find that all the movements are performed automatically; little or no conscious thought or direction is required. At this stage the movements have been programmed into the mind. Awareness of the physical movement is very important.

After this has been mastered ensure that the breath is correctly synchronized with the movement. Awareness should be on both the physical movement and the breathing. Later the mantras can be learnt and synchronized with each position. In the final stage the awareness should be directed as much as possible on the movement, breathing and mantra repetition. In its final form, surya namaskara consists of these different aspects welded together to give an integrated whole. Therefore, to make sure that the final practice is correct it is essential to master this technique in the progressive manner described.

Technique – postures and breathing

The following pages describe step by step the twelve different positions of surya namaskara together with the associated breathing sequence.



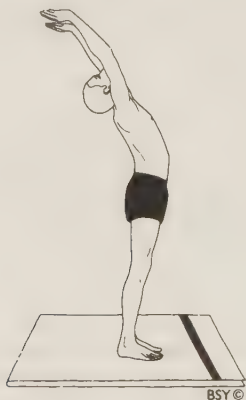
**POSITION 1: PRANAMASANA
(PRAYER POSE)**

Stand erect with the feet together.
Face the sun or the direction of the sun.
Place the two palms together in front of the chest in an attitude of prayer, the namaskara mudra.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.
Be aware of the body for at least half a minute.
This will prepare you for the forthcoming practice.

Try to consciously relax the muscles of the body.

Breathing: Breathe normally with full awareness.

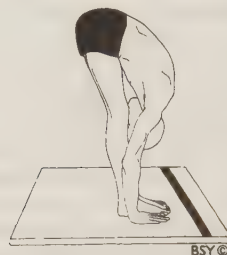


**POSITION 2: HASTA UTTHANASANA
(RAISED ARMS POSE)**

Raise both arms above the head, keeping hands separated by a shoulder's width.
At the end of the movement bend the head, arms and upper trunk backwards.

The palms should face forwards.
The movement should be executed in one smooth motion with awareness.

Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms.



**POSITION 3: PADAHASTASANA
(HAND TO FOOT POSE)**

Bend forward and place the palms of the hands on the floor, either in front of or on each side of the feet.

The movement should be continuous and without any jerking.

Keep the legs straight.

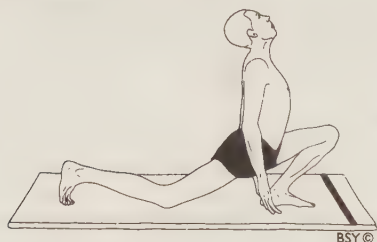
If possible, try to touch your knees with your forehead or chin; (be careful of your nose for you may cause injury when doing surya namaskara quickly).

Under no circumstances should undue force be used in order to attain the final position.

Breathing: Exhale as deeply as possible while bending forwards and if possible accentuate the contraction of the abdomen, especially in the final position.

Beginners: Beginners and people with stiff backs will find the final pose difficult to attain. If you cannot touch the floor with your hands, or at most can only touch the floor with your fingertips, don't worry. It is only a matter of practice. As you become more supple through yoga practices, you will be surprised to find how easy it becomes to place the palms flat on the floor. Only time and practice are necessary. It is important that the legs remain straight in position three, so that the leg muscles (hamstring muscles) are stretched and the legs become more flexible. However, beginners who cannot touch the floor will have to adapt in the following manner: bend forwards as far as you can and try to touch the floor with the fingers or hands, keeping the legs straight. Try to stretch the legs a little more by reaching towards the floor with the fingers, then bend

the legs to place the palms on the floor in order to assume position four. However, if avoidable, the legs should not be bent.



POSITION 4: ASHWA SANCHALANASANA (EQUESTRIAN POSE)

Stretch the right leg backwards as far as you can.

Simultaneously bend the left leg at the knee, but keeping the left foot in the same position. The palms should remain on the floor and the arms should remain straight.

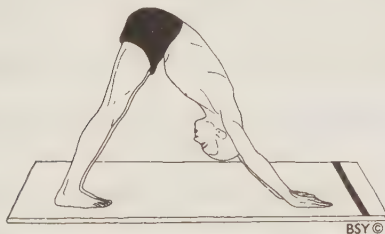
Beginners: If this is too difficult for beginners the palms can be raised off the ground, with only the fingertips in contact with the floor. This helps to increase the arch of the back.

In the final position the toes and knee of the extended right leg should be in contact with the ground.

Complete the movement by bending the head backwards and arching the spine as much as possible without straining.

The movement should be executed smoothly and with awareness.

Breathing: inhale deeply as you move the body.



POSITION 5: PARVATASANA (MOUNTAIN POSE)

Raise your right knee.

Simultaneously lower your head towards the floor and bend the back so that the buttocks move upwards.

Stretch the left leg backwards and place the left foot beside the right foot.

Then raise the buttocks as high as possible into the air and further lower the head so that it lies between the two arms.

The legs should be straightened in the final position.

Try to press the heels of both feet towards the ground.

Throughout the practice the arms must remain straight, and the hands and right foot should remain in contact with the floor.

Though attainment of position five requires the movement of various parts of the body, all the movements should be synchronized to form one harmonious and smooth motion.

Breathing: exhale deeply as you perform the movement.



POSITION 6: ASHTANGA NAMASKARA (WORSHIP WITH EIGHT POINTS)

This position is so called because in the final pose eight points of the body are in contact with the ground.

Lower the body to the ground, first bending the legs and placing the knees in contact with the floor.

Bend the arms and lower the head and trunk towards the ground.

Try to brush your forehead along the surface of the floor as you move the head and trunk forwards.

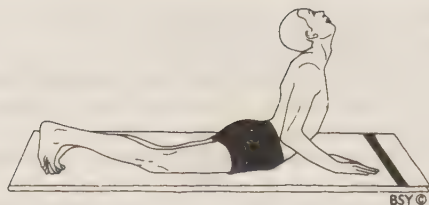
At the end of the forward movement of the head and trunk, let the chest brush along the surface of the floor and rest the chin on the ground.

Finally raise the abdomen and hips slightly off the ground.

In the final position the eight points should be on the ground: the chin, the chest, two palms, two knees and the balls of both feet.

The whole movement should be smoothly executed.

Breathing: Hold the breath outside, i.e. don't breathe in.



POSITION 7: BHUJANGASANA (COBRA POSE)

Lower the hips to the ground. Simultaneously straighten the arms so that the head and back arch upwards. In the final position the head and back should be bent backwards as far as is comfortable, but try to keep the abdomen as close as possible to the floor, without straining. The position of the hands and feet should not change throughout the movement.
Breathing: Inhale deeply during the movement.

POSITION EIGHT: PARVATASANA (MOUNTAIN POSE)

This position is a repeat of position 5. From the arched position of bhujangasana bend the back in the opposite direction so that the buttocks move upwards. Keep the arms and legs straight and don't move the position of the hands and feet. In the final pose the buttocks should be as high as possible, the head should be between the arms and the heels should be gently pressed towards the floor.
Breathing: Exhale while performing the movement.

POSITION 9: ASHWA SANCHALANASANA (EQUESTRIAN POSE)

This position is a repeat of position 4. Bend the left leg and place the left foot between the two hands. Simultaneously raise the head upwards, arch the back downwards and lower the right knee to the floor. The position of the two hands and the right foot must not change. The arms should remain straight throughout. In the final pose, accentuate the arching of the back and bend the head backwards as far as possible.
Breathing: Inhale deeply while assuming the final pose.

POSITION 10: PADAHASTASANA (HAND TO FOOT POSE)

This position is the same as position 3. Lower the head towards the ground. Simultaneously raise the buttocks and right knee upwards. Then, when you are able, place the right foot beside the left foot in between the hands. Straighten the legs and try to touch the forehead to the knees.
Breathing: Exhale deeply as you move the head towards the knees.
Beginners: Ideally, the hands should remain on the floor throughout the movement. However, beginners will find that because of inflexibility of the back they will be unable to straighten the legs if they try to keep their hands on the floor. They should, therefore, allow their hands to leave the floor as they straighten the legs. However, in position three they should stretch the fingers further towards the floor for a few seconds when their legs are straight. This will encourage the back to become more supple so that you can eventually keep the palms on the floor with the legs straight.

POSITION 11: HASTA UTTHANASANA (RAISED ARMS POSE)

This position is the same as position 2. Smoothly straighten the whole body. Keep the arms straight and separated by about a shoulder's width. Raise the arms over the head and lean the head, arms and back slightly backwards. To do this the abdomen must be pushed a little forwards.
Breathing: Inhale throughout the movement.

POSITION 12: PRANAMASANA (PRAYER POSE)

This is the final pose and the same as position 1. Bring the palms together and hold them in front of the chest. Relax the whole body.
Breathing: Exhale while assuming the final pose.
Breathing: Breathe normally while remaining in the final position prior to continuing the practice.

One complete round

We have described twelve positions. This constitutes a half round of surya namaskara. One full round consists of twenty-four positions. To complete the second half of surya namaskara the same twelve positions are repeated but with two minor modifications. These are as follows:

1. In position 16 the left leg is extended backwards followed by the right leg in position 17. This is instead of stretching the right leg backwards as in position 4, followed by the left leg in position 5.
2. In position 21 the right leg is brought forward followed by the left leg in position 22. This is instead of bringing the left leg forwards in position 9 followed by the right leg in position 10. The breathing sequence and the mantras remain unchanged. This alternation of the twelve basic positions to form twenty-four is necessary to ensure that both halves of the body are exercised equally – surya namaskara is a perfectly symmetrical exercise.

Breathing

Make sure that you breathe through the nose and not the mouth. If necessary, do jala neti before commencing surya namaskara or your daily practice program.

The breathing sequence in surya namaskara is perfectly natural and should occur spontaneously. The breathing that we have already related to each position is that which the body will automatically do, and any attempt to breathe differently will prove uncomfortable and awkward. There is an easy principle to remember when you are learning surya namaskara. When you bend backwards, inhale, for the chest expands, inducing air into the lungs. And when you bend forwards, then you must exhale, because the abdomen is being compressed, which in turn reduces the volume of the lungs, via the diaphragm, and air is forced out of the lungs. Only while assuming position six, is the breath retained, and if you experiment for yourself you will find that this is also perfectly natural, for it is difficult to lower the body and breathe at the same time.

In summary, there is little or no effort required on your part to ensure correct breathing: your body will tell you. But what you must do is accentuate the inhalation and exhalation more

than the body will do naturally. Some effort will be required in this direction.

Awareness

Awareness is an essential part of surya namaskara. If it is performed without any awareness or any attempt to be aware most of the benefits are lost².

If you have time it is preferable to stand for a few minutes in position one preparing yourself physically and mentally for the coming practice. The eyes should be closed. If you don't have very much time, then thirty seconds is sufficient. Be aware of your whole body and the breathing pattern. Try to feel that you are detached from your body and breathing.

See or feel a mental picture of the different parts of the body and try to relax them, but at the same time try to remember that you are merely witnessing. The different parts of the body and the breathing are something external; feel as though you are apart from them. Be aware of sensations, but again with a feeling of detachment, with the attitude of being the witness. Experience the peace that comes through merely being, without the confusion and tension of life or having to do something. During daily life most of us are continually extroverted, or if we are introverted it is usually of a morbid, self-deprecating form. Just for a short time be introverted with awareness of your feelings. Do not plan for the future or regret the past. Live in the present, even if only for a short time. This can bring wonderful peace of mind.

When you are ready, begin the practice. Maintain awareness throughout. Your eyes may be opened or closed, although after mastering the practice it is better to keep the eyes closed. Witness the various movements of the body and the corresponding breathing. Don't lose yourself in the practice, watch and be continually aware of every movement you perform. In this way surya namaskara becomes a very powerful practice. It not only harmonizes the whole body and mind, but it also develops the ability of awareness and concentration. These wonderful and practical benefits will carry over into your daily life.

Relaxation

An essential sequel to surya namaskara is relaxation. It is necessary to rest the body and

allow the heartbeat and respiration to return to normal. It is also essential to intensify the feeling of mental peace and awareness. Any method of relaxation can be used, but we highly recommend shavasana because it is a scientific method which induces optimum relaxation of mind and body, at the same time intensifying the awareness¹.

The time spent on relaxation depends mainly on the time taken to perform surya namaskara. At least three or four minutes should be spent relaxing for every ten minutes of surya namaskara. At least five minutes should be spent relaxing if it takes twenty minutes to practise surya namaskara. It is important to relax the body until the heartbeat and respiration return to normal. The practitioner must use his own discretion in this respect.

Tempo

You can do surya namaskara as rapidly or as slowly as you wish; the choice is yours. At first, it should be done slowly to ensure correct development of the movement and breathing. With regular practice your body will begin to gradually flow through the different positions. Under these circumstances you will automatically be able to perform each round in less time. However, be careful not to do the practice so quickly that the inhalation and exhalation becomes shallow and the mantras are not pronounced correctly. Eventually, you will find that the tempo of surya namaskara will be automatically fixed by the time necessary to perform the movement, breath and mantra.

Number of rounds

The number of rounds depends on the health of the individual as well as on the time available. Surya namaskara should not be done to the point of exhaustion. Beginners should start with no more than two or three rounds and add one more round on each successive two days. In this way the body will gradually become accustomed to the increased exercise.

It is really impossible to lay down a fixed number of rounds to be done every morning, for this depends entirely on the individual. Do as many as you can in the time available. However, at the slightest sign of exhaustion stop the practice and relax the body. In fact, the body should be your guide as to the

number of rounds that you can manage – listen to it carefully and take heed of it. As a rough suggestion, however, a person of reasonably good health should eventually aim to do about twelve rounds every morning. Of course, those who are able can do more, and many people do. If you are not sure on this point seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher who can prescribe a suitable number of rounds to suit you individually depending on your state of health.

Sequence

Surya namaskara is ideally practised before doing other asanas, as it helps to remove any sleepiness and to loosen up the body in preparation for your asana practice.

When and where

The best time to practise surya namaskara is in the morning at sunrise. Face the rising sun to absorb the health giving ultraviolet rays. If this is impractical in view of the time of sunrise, climatic conditions and coordination with other yogic practices, it can be done first thing in the morning, preferably after going to the toilet.

Surya namaskara can be practised at other times during the day. However, it is important to wait at least three hours after meals, before attempting the practice. Later in the morning before lunch and in the afternoon before dinner are both good times. It is not advisable to do surya namaskara before sleep because it activates the entire body and this is the opposite effect to what is desired before going to bed.

If possible, practise in the open air, perhaps on a lawn or any clean flat surface. A thin mattress, mat or blanket can be placed on the ground but it must be firmly fixed. Otherwise, while learning surya namaskara in particular, the mat tends to slide backwards.

Limitations

There are absolutely no sex or age limitations with regard to the practice of surya namaskara; both young and old, male and female can do it and gain its many benefits. However, ladies should not do it after their fourth month of pregnancy, but it can be continued after childbirth. Furthermore, ladies are advised not to do it during menstruation as a precautionary measure.

People with certain ailments, such as sciatica, slipped disc, high blood pressure, coronary ailments and so on should not do surya namaskara. If you are not sure on this point seek expert guidance.

Precautions

Surya namaskara is a powerful method of eliminating toxins from the body. However, these toxins should not be eliminated too quickly, for they may manifest in a number of uncomfortable ways, such as huge painful boils. If any such symptoms or sign of fever begins to show, reduce the number of rounds of surya namaskara or even stop altogether for a few days. The toxins must be eliminated from the body, but it should be done gradually over a period of weeks or months, using surya namaskara, asanas and pranayama.

As we have already stated, don't strain yourself by doing more rounds than your physical condition will comfortably allow. Additionally, don't attempt surya namaskara if you are ill, because at this time all the energy of the body needs to be internalized to heal and remove the ailment.

Instructions

At first some mental effort is required to memorize the different positions, breathing and the mantras. An excellent method of quickly mastering the exercise is for a friend to read you the instructions while you accordingly carry them out. In this way all the important aspects of the exercise will be clearly imprinted in your memory.

Benefits

The obvious characteristic of surya namaskara is the fact that it exercises the entire body. The back is bent forwards and backwards, the arms and legs are bent and straightened, the abdomen is compressed, stretched and so on. It is an integral exercise that influences the health of the whole body. It is not confined to developing one part of the body, such as the arm muscles, like so many other forms of exercises and gymnastics.

The body consists of various systems and organs which interrelate and coordinate with each other to give the best possible health and efficiency. It is very easy for these systems to become disrupted. The result is disease and

lack of vitality etc. Surya namaskara brings these systems – the circulatory, respiratory, endocrinal, etc. – into balance with one another, thereby helping to prevent and remove disease. Let us briefly discuss some of the main systems in the body and how they benefit from surya namaskara.

Digestive system: The abdominal organs and stomach are alternately stretched and compressed. This imparts a healthy massage to the internal organs and ensures that they function correctly, or if they don't currently work efficiently, encourages them to do so. Many diseases of the digestive system can be prevented and removed by the regular practice of surya namaskara.

Eliminative system: Rapid elimination of waste materials from the body is essential. Often undigested waste products remain in the intestines and bowels due to constipation, which can result in various other disorders. Surya namaskara stimulates the peristalsis of the intestines helping to remove any tendency towards constipation.

The kidneys are also important eliminative organs. They filter impurities from the blood and eliminate them from the body in the form of urine.

Therefore, any disorder or inefficiency in the workings of the kidneys will result in impure blood. Surya namaskara gently massages these two organs, increases their supply of blood, as well as speeds up the circulation throughout the body. The result is that the kidneys are encouraged to function properly while at the same time the blood is given an additional flush and filter through the kidneys. For best results one should supplement the daily practice of surya namaskara by drinking plenty of clean, fresh water.

A high proportion of the body's waste products are eliminated through the skin. This process works particularly well when a person sweats profusely. Often toxins accumulate in the skin, manifesting as boils and pimples. If a good sweat was developed regularly there would be less tendency for this to happen as the toxins would reach the outer surface of the skin and be washed off. Surya namaskara results in increased perspiration and thereby encourages the elimination of toxins from the body, helping to prevent skin ailments. This is an excellent method of acquiring a fresh

complexion, especially if one takes a bath after surya namaskara or the yoga practice program.

Circulatory system: Surya namaskara increases the heartbeat and the workings of the whole circulatory system, helping to eliminate waste materials from the body. Areas of sluggish blood are also removed and replaced by purified and oxygenated blood. All the cells of the body receive extra nutrition enabling them to function more efficiently. This leads to better health and increased vitality.

The lymphatic system is also speeded up. This system is most important in protecting the body against infection. It is the body's auto-therapeutic system and without it the body would quickly succumb to disease. Surya namaskara, by increasing the circulation and the removal of poisonous bacteria, directly aids the lymphatic system to work more efficiently in its fight against illness.

Respiratory system: Most people tend to breathe superficially in short and shallow gasps. This starves the body of the oxygen it requires for perfect health. Carbon dioxide also tends to accumulate in the system. Further under-utilization of the lung capacity allows a build-up of germs which can lead to various illnesses. Surya namaskara, when done correctly, accentuates the exchange of air to and from the lungs, opens and expands the intricate alveoli, or air sacs, of the lung tissue and exercises the muscles of the surrounding chest region. The lungs are emptied of impurities and stale air and the body and brain are revitalized by the extra supply of oxygen they receive. One can almost feel the extra super-charge of energy.

Endocrinal system: This system plays an important part in determining our wellbeing and attitude towards life. It consists of a large number of different chemicals (hormones) which interact with each other, reinforcing or counteracting each other. Even the slightest imbalance can cause widespread repercussions in the form of disease. A well-known example is diabetes. There are many other illnesses which are a direct result of hormonal imbalance. The hormones are the officers of the body, the brain is the commander and the parts of the body are the soldiers. It is the hormones that mobilize and coordinate the different functions of the body. Rate of growth, sexual functions, excitability and so on are all controlled by hormones.

Surya namaskara harmonizes this system helping to remove any irregularities by directly massaging the relevant glands and improving their blood flow. Imbalance of the endocrinal system is often caused by mental tension. Surya namaskara can help to remove or reduce this deeper cause of hormonal malfunction, especially if it is supplemented by other yoga practices.

Nervous system: The multitudes of nerve connections throughout the body are gently stretched, massaged and stimulated while doing surya namaskara. It is these nerves that connect the different parts and organs of the body with the brain. The nerves are the intermediaries. Even if an organ is in perfect condition it can only function as well as the nerves will allow. If the nerves are unhealthy then the functioning of the associated organs must suffer. If the pipe connecting the water tank to the tap is blocked, then the tap cannot work properly, even though it might be perfectly new. It is the same with the body's nervous system. The nerve fibres determine how well the organs and muscles of the body function.

Most modern, sedentary people don't exercise their bodies sufficiently. As a consequence the nerve connections tend to become lazy and atrophy develops. Surya namaskara tones up these nerves and simultaneously awakens the associated brain centres. One feels more alive after a few rounds of this exercise.

Muscles and skeleton: Surya namaskara exercises all the main muscles and joints in the body. The muscles are contracted and extended and any impure, stagnant blood is redirected back to the lungs and kidneys for purification. It is an excellent method of loosening up the body for asana practice.

Subtle influences: Surya namaskara can give many additional and perhaps more important benefits beyond the physical. It depends on your attitude. If you are aware and totally involved with the intonation of the mantras, the breathing and the movements, it will induce peace of mind. It is therefore a very useful exercise in reducing emotional conflict, neurosis and stress, especially when supplemented by other yoga practices. If one is devotionally inclined then the exercise can be done with full knowledge of the significance of

worshipping the sun. This will purify the heart and mind. Surya namaskara also helps to bring the flow of pranic or bioplasmic energy into balance and remove blockages in the nadis through which it flows. Surya namaskara is an excellent practice with which to start the day. It helps to prepare you in every way to face the oncoming day with physical and mental strength and confidence.

Summary

Surya namaskara is a panacea for those people who live in cities and towns and who find insufficient time and opportunity to take adequate exercise. People in the country automatically exercise their bodies and relax their minds, as well as feel an intimate relationship with everything around them. It is urban people who suffer from the majority of diseases. The main reason is lack of exercise and peace of mind. Surya namaskara is the answer, especially if done in conjunction with other yogic techniques. There is no reason why most people cannot practise it daily. It only takes a matter of ten minutes or so. During this short period of time the body is exercised in the most systematic and comprehensive manner possible. There is no other exercise that can surpass it. Running, walking and swimming are all excellent exercises no doubt, but they don't exercise the body as effectively as surya namaskara in the time available. So needless to say we highly recommend that you practise surya namaskara. In fact, we regard surya namaskara so highly that we will recommend that you practise it in your daily practice program from now onwards throughout the book.

Notes

- ¹ Shavasana: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;
Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8
- ² For further details on the subject of awareness –
Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

Hatha Yoga: Vatsara Dhauti

The subject of burping has long been controversial in various societies throughout the world. In China and during the middle ages of Europe, it was almost a ritual to end a meal by burping. This clearly showed that one had enjoyed his food. If a person did not burp he was likely to be labelled bad mannered or even a boor. Burping was almost considered an art. This art has been lost in modern societies because it is considered both crude and distasteful. Nevertheless, we are devoting this next topic to the revival of this noble and ancient art.

The *Gheranda Samhita* says the following: "Shape your lips like a crow's beak and drink air. Let the air swirl in the stomach for some time and then allow it to expel itself. Vatsara dhauti is a most secret technique to purify the body. It destroys all diseases and increases the gastric fire." (1:15-16)

Usefulness of practice

Under normal circumstances burping brings a wonderful and immediate sense of relief. It is a normal response which none of us can avoid, for we all tend to swallow air while we eat. This is trapped in each mouthful of food and accumulates in the stomach. The amount of air swallowed, of course, varies greatly with eating habits, but it may be as high as half a litre. A little of this passes into the intestinal tract but most of it is expelled by means of the simple expedient of burping.

Vatsara dhauti uses the same basic process, but instead of inducing air into the stomach by eating food, it is induced by voluntary effort. In other words, air is sucked into the stomach while inhaling. To many people, especially children, this technique will come almost naturally. In fact, they will have already practised it for the fun of hearing the resulting noise on expulsion, without realizing that they are performing an ancient practice of yoga.

The main reason for doing the practice is to clean the stomach of stale, foul smelling gases. Furthermore, many processes of digestion work far better when there is a liberal supply of oxygen in the stomach. The oxygen seems to encourage the best possible digestion of food. In this way, aeration of the stomach aids digestion and eliminates waste gas.

VATSARA DHAUTI

Sit in any comfortable position.

The aim is to direct the inhaled air into the stomach instead of the lungs.

Open your mouth.

If you wish you can purse your lips together like a crow's beak as given in the *Gheranda Samhita*, but this is not essential.

Try to suck air into the mouth.

To do this you must try to create a vacuum in the stomach.

This is not difficult, but may require a little practice. It can either be done in one sucking action, or in a series of gulps.

Choose whatever method is easiest.

Fill the stomach as much as possible.

Then completely relax.

Don't try to expel the air; it will automatically come out in its own time.

This is vatsara dhauti, secret of all the ages.

Frequency and time of practice

You can practise it as many times as you want, but once or twice is sufficient just before eating. It can be done at any time of the day, but preferably not during or immediately after a big meal. This practice is most useful, however, if performed just before you eat a large or heavy meal as it stimulates the digestive system to work at a higher level of efficiency.

Benefits

We have treated this practice in a rather light-hearted and superficial manner, because it is

very difficult to be serious and factual about such a maligned subject. However, we emphasize that we are serious when we say that this practice is beneficial. It increases the digestive power of the body by improving the chemical reactions taking place within the stomach. It removes impure and unwanted gases and helps to eliminate and prevent hyperacidity and especially heartburn.

When one considers that a large number of ailments arise from digestive disorders, the necessity for a healthy digestive system becomes obvious. Vatsara dhauti is one method of attaining this end.

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 2)

In this topic we will further develop the practice of nadi shodhana by describing the more advanced form of stage 2, the preliminary form of which was described in the previous lesson¹.

The essential requirement of nadi shodhana is slow, deep and rhythmical breathing. This results in less number of breaths every minute, for as one breathes more deeply the frequency of respiration automatically decreases. In everyday life most people breathe fifteen to twenty times per minute. These are generally shallow gasps which use only a very small portion of the available lung capacity. As such, a lot of energy is used in breathing, with a relatively small return in terms of the energy that we induce into the body. In other words, we could easily induce the same or even more vital energy into the body, in the form of oxygen, and expend less muscular energy by breathing slowly, deeply and rhythmically. Rhythm too is important, for spasmodic, jerky respiration also tends to use up far more muscular energy than smooth and relaxed respiration. This is one of the reasons, although not the main one, for practising nadi shodhana pranayama: to train us to habitually breathe in a sensible and economical manner.

Rapid breathing is directly associated with excitability, nervousness, anger and other extreme emotions. Anyone who doubts this should watch carefully how their breathing rate increases when they feel angry. This may be a little difficult or even impossible, because most people become completely involved and identified with their emotions. It is difficult to be aware of oneself under conditions of intense emotions; in fact if we were able to observe our feelings as a witness then these intense outbursts would gradually disappear. However, try to watch how other people's moods relate to their breathing. Or as an alternative, consider the breathing rates of different animals as illustrative of the direct connection

between excitability and respiration. Animals which breathe slowly such as elephants, snakes, tortoises, etc., epitomize calmness, whereas fast breathing animals such as birds, dogs, cats and rabbits appear to live a much more stressful existence.

Another related factor is that animals which breathe slowly are also renowned for their longevity. The ancient yogis clearly recognized this fact and recommended slow and deep breathing as a means to achieve not only a long life, but also a calm and relaxed one. From this stabilization it is possible to make progress in yoga.

People who suffer from nervous disorders should particularly take note of this association between breathing and nervousness, for they especially tend to breathe quickly and superficially. From this nervousness results directly or indirectly most, if not all, illnesses. Regular practice of nadi shodhana pranayama helps to calm the mind and the nerves. This applies particularly to sedentary people who have a tendency to breathe in short, sharp gasps and it is no coincidence that most nervous diseases occur among town and city dwellers.

The primary purpose of pranayama is to induce mental tranquillity as a means to meditation. Nadi shodhana is no exception. First of all it progressively reduces the rate and increases the depth of respiration. Secondly, by balancing the flows through the two nostrils it helps to bring the pranic body into balance. Both of these aspects induce calmness of mind. The slower one breathes and the more one is aware of the process, the greater the degree of tranquillity attained. This is the reason why in nadi shodhana stage 2 we emphasize the importance of progressively slowing down the breathing rate.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 2 (ADVANCED)

The reader should refer to the first part of nadi shodhana stage 2¹ where we described how to progressively slow down the respiration. Nadi shodhana stage 1 must be practised for a few minutes¹, followed by stage 2, with the aim of making the inhalation and exhalation longer and longer in duration but always maintaining the ratio 1:1. Before you attempt the second part of stage 2 you should perform the above process. Then without break continue the following practice.

Technique

Start to slowly increase the duration of exhalation.

Remember to continue to mentally count the duration of exhalation and inhalation.

Each interval of counting should last for 1 second; in other words if you breathe in for a count of 5 then this corresponds to a duration of 5 seconds.

Make sure that you are aware of both the mental counting and the process of breathing. Remember 1 round consists of inhalation through the left nostril, followed by exhalation through the right nostril, inhalation through the right and finally exhalation via the left. Over the space of 5 rounds make the exhalation 1 second longer than inhalation.

For example, if you breathe in for a count of 5 then exhale for a count of 6.

If you breathe in for a count of 10 then exhale for a count of 11.

The actual count depends entirely on how far you have progressed with the previous lesson¹. Don't under any circumstances use force or strain.

Your duration of exhalation and inhalation should be perfectly comfortable.

Then after a few rounds add 1 more second onto the duration of exhalation.

Do this only if you are able to do it comfortably. After a few more rounds try to further increase the exhalation by 1 more second.

Continue in this manner until you either find it impossible to increase the length of duration any further without straining, or if you reach a stage where exhalation is twice as long as inhalation.

The eventual aim is to make the ratio of

exhalation to inhalation fixed at 1:2.

How quickly you attain this depends of course on what your count was for the initial 1:1 ratio. However, don't try to progress too quickly – there is plenty of time.

When you reach the 1:2 ratio then you should start to increase the inhalation by 1 second and the exhalation by 2 seconds to maintain the same 1:2 ratio.

Continue to increase the actual duration over each practice session.

In this way you should be able to start each sitting with a larger and larger count as you make progress.

Remember it is essential to maintain awareness of breathing and mental counting throughout the whole practice.

Do the practise for as long as you have the time available.

General hints

If your nose is blocked it is essential to perform jala neti prior to practising pranayama². Even if your nose is reasonably clear it is still beneficial to do jala neti prior to your yoga practices.

Try to breathe without making any noise as the air enters and leaves the nostrils. Noise is a sure sign that you are breathing too quickly. Of course, if you cannot breathe sufficiently slowly to eliminate noise then don't worry, only bear this in mind. With practice your breathing rate will definitely reduce. The breathing must be relaxed and without violent heaving and movements of the body.

Try to practise yogic breathing³.

Timing

It is important to maintain a constant speed of counting and that each count or time unit is one second. To check this in the early stages, time the duration of practice on a clock. To do this, merely note the time of commencing the practice, perform a set number of rounds without changing the time of inhalation and exhalation and note the time at the end of the practice. From this you can work out the period of each round. By dividing this period by the number of counts for one round, the duration of each count or time unit can be calculated. From this you can adjust your counting rate, speeding it up if it is too slow, or slowing it down if it is too fast. Eventually you will be

able to count uniformly so that the duration of each time unit is one second. This will become an ingrained habit and will be very useful for future practices.

Sequence

To recapitulate, one should first of all do nadi shodhana stage 1, then the preliminary part of stage 2¹ and finally stage 2 that we have described in this topic. At first the time that you have available to do pranayama should be divided into three parts: a third allocated to each of the above three divisions. If you have sufficient time and as you progress, slowly increase the relative duration of the final part of stage 2.

Full details of duration, awareness, precautions and benefits can be found in the previous lesson¹.

Notes

¹ Nadi shodhana: stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4;
stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

Meditation: Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi

In the previous lesson we introduced you to a meditation technique which used awareness of the breath as a means for inducing relaxation, introversion and eventually (we hope) a meditative state¹. In this topic we will develop the same theme by describing two methods called anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi, which also require breath awareness.

Though anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi have different names and are often performed separately, they are ideally practised together, one following on from the other. If you have time these practices can be done after performing the previous meditation practice¹.

These two practices closely relate to and can be easily integrated with the practices of nadi shodhana that we have already discussed. In fact they supplement each other.

The Sanskrit word *anuloma viloma* means 'up and down', 'alternate' or 'reversed'. This is a technique in which the flow of breath is reversed through each nostril alternately. The word shuddhi means 'purification' and the word prana you already know². Therefore, prana shuddhi can be defined as a practice which purifies the flow of prana in the body.

Technique

Assume a comfortable sitting position. Shavasana can also be used, if preferred, but a sitting pose is best for there is less tendency to sleep. Furthermore, a sitting pose should certainly be assumed if these techniques are performed immediately after the practice of pranayama.

Relax the whole body and close the eyes. Become totally aware of the breathing process. Feel as though nothing else exists but your breath.

First do anuloma viloma.

Try to feel that you are only breathing in and out of the left nostril; some imagination may be necessary for this condition might not be the case.

However, your imagination will help to bring this state about in reality.

Continue this practice for a minute or two.

Then repeat the same thing with your right nostril; try to feel that the whole flow of breath is moving in and out of the right nostril.

Again do this for a minute or so.

Be aware of breathing throughout the practice.

Now you must try to mentally control the breath flow moving in and out of each nostril alternately.

Feel that you are inhaling through the left nostril.

Then feel the exhalation through the right nostril.

Feel the breath being inhaled through the right nostril.

And then the breath being exhaled via the left nostril.

This is 1 round of anuloma viloma.

Do 4 rounds.

Then you have to do 1 round of prana shuddhi. This involves breathing in and out through both nostrils together.

Prana shuddhi is sometimes called conical breathing for one imagines the flow of air moves through both nostrils simultaneously in the form of an inverted 'V'.

In other words, during inhalation the flows of air through both nostrils meet at a point at the centre of the eyebrows; and during exhalation the air flows diverge from the centre of the eyebrows.

Both imagination and awareness are required. A single inhalation and exhalation is 1 round of prana shuddhi.

After this you do 4 more rounds of anuloma viloma followed by 1 round of prana shuddhi. Continue practising in this manner.

Simultaneously mentally count each round starting from 100 and ending with 1 in the following way: 100 – one round of anuloma viloma (i.e. breathe through left, out through right, in through the right and out through

the left nostril). 99 – second round of anuloma viloma. 98 – third round of anuloma viloma. 97 – fourth round of anuloma viloma. 96 – one round of prana shuddhi.

And then the whole process is repeated – 95, 94, 93, 92 anuloma viloma followed by 91 for prana shuddhi. And so on.

It is important not to forget the order and awareness of counting.

If your mind wanders and you forget to count then you must start again.

If you have time continue the practice until you reach the count of 1.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Do not force the breathing but allow it to assume a normal flow.

The duration, of course, depends on the time that you have available. At least ten minutes is necessary. To perform the whole practice from one hundred to one, however, will require more than ten minutes if one breathes at the average relaxed rate of about fifteen respirations per minute. In this case those people who have less time available can start with a count of fifty instead of one hundred. The reader must use his own discretion in this respect.

As in all practices of yoga, awareness is essential. Complete awareness of both breath and mental counting must be maintained throughout the practice. This is a little difficult at first and one will find that after a few rounds or even less that one has lost track of the counting. This indicates loss of awareness of the practice in hand. Don't worry about this – there are very few people, especially beginners, who can do the complete practice from start to finish without losing count. One must merely start to count again. With practice you will make noticeable progress and be able to keep your awareness on the counting and breath.

Sequence

Anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi are ideally performed directly after practising nadi shodhana pranayama. It can also be practised alone or following on from the breathing technique in Lesson 4, as a method of inducing relaxation¹. It can be done at any time during the day.

Benefits

It brings about relaxation of the mind and body, increases mental concentration and awareness and is a method of inducing states of meditation.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Daily Practice Program

At this stage the student should be more aware of his or her own physical body and the parts of the body which are especially stiff or malfunctioning and therefore require particular attention. Although our human bodies are similar in design they are different in makeup. For example, some people have stiff legs, while others have stiff backs; and in the same way some people have abdominal disorders while some have ailments in other areas of the body. Therefore we feel that only you, the practitioner, can really choose the most beneficial practice program to suit your

personal needs. We will continue to suggest programs and you should continue to use them as a guideline, adapting them more and more to your own needs by adding or eliminating practices. This applies mainly to asanas.

The inclusion of meditation practices in the program is very important, therefore try to find the time daily for a separate practice of meditation. At this stage at least 10 minutes, if not more, should be allocated to meditation techniques such as anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi. This is essential if one wants to progress on the path of yoga.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	3 to start	6
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Marjar-iasana	15	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Naukasana	2 rounds	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)	—	15
Meditation practice:		
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi—		12
		60

Program 2: duration ¼ hour

Surya Namaskara	3 to start	5
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Marjari-asana	15	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each side	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)	—	12
Meditation practice:		
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi—		12
		45

Program 3: duration ½ hour

Surya Namaskara	3 to start	5
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each side	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1 and 2 (prel and adv)	—	12
		30

Lesson 6

Khechhari mudra is performed by inserting the tongue in the upper cavity of the palate and gazing at the eyebrow centre. By its practice the yogi attains immortality and overcomes death. He has no fear of losing himself in unconsciousness, and the influences of sleep (absence of awareness), hunger and thirst (urges of the senses) will no longer affect him.

Neither unconsciousness (laya), nor diseases, nor karmas will be able to influence the practitioner of khechhari mudra. His chitta dwells in chidakasha and he will be beyond the influence of time and space. Therefore the siddhas (perfected ones) give salutation to this mudra.

He who is able to close the upper palate by khechhari mudra will become the master of vajroli (locking of the nadi through which the sexual energy flows), because by this mudra the bindu (semen) becomes steady forever. Even at the climax of a passionate embrace, when the bindu remains steady in the body, then where is the fear of death?

—*DhyanaBindu Upanishad* (79–84)

The Structure of Yoga

There are many different paths of yoga. In fact, in the ashram library there is one Hindi book listing well over a hundred different types. However, most of these separate paths are only slight variations of a few basic forms of yoga practices. These numerous variations arise from modifications designed to suit the temperaments and beliefs of everyone, and in a sense we can say that there is a different path of yoga for each individual, for each person has a unique personality. However, our personalities are more notable for their similarities than differences, as we are all composed of a few basic characteristics such as emotion, tendency to activity, etc. Because of these common aspects, yoga can be separated into a few paths which cater for each of these facets of personality. It is these fundamental paths that we want to briefly discuss in this topic.

The different paths

The various paths of yoga lead to the same point or source. They are often compared to different rivers which flow into the sea. At first they are completely separate and are known by different names. However, as the rivers progress, they begin to merge with each other until eventually they are totally absorbed in the ocean. The rivers completely lose their individuality. It is the same with the various yogic paths. At first they have specific characteristics and sometimes even appear to contradict each other, but as one progresses along any one or number of these paths, their separateness disappears. All the paths of yoga incorporate the same aim: physical health, mental peace and higher awareness.

The following is a list of the main branches of yoga: mantra yoga, kundalini yoga, laya yoga, hatha yoga, raja yoga, Patanjali yoga, bhakti yoga, dhyana yoga, swara yoga, karma yoga, kriya yoga, japa yoga, jnana yoga. There are many more, and we will try to briefly define these different paths in the following pages.

The many variations of yoga can be broadly classified into five basic groups. These cater for the most prominent aspects of our personality:

- *Karma yoga*: the path of activity.
- *Bhakti yoga*: the path of devotion.
- *Jnana yoga*: the path of enquiry.
- *Raja yoga*: the path of introspection.
- *Hatha yoga*: the path of balancing the mental, physical and subtle (pranic or bioplasmic) forces of the body.

Any other forms of yoga can be placed under these five headings.

All of us have a tendency to be introspective and to enquire about the nature of life and other topics that vitally influence us. Simultaneously, everyone has emotional tendencies by nature and are continually performing actions in one form or another. Lastly, everyone has a mind and physical body as well as a bioplasmic body, though few of us realize the latter aspect of our being. It is the way that these aspects of our consciousness relate to each other that determines our personality. In other words, some of us are more emotional or devotional than others. For these people the path of bhakti yoga is recommended. Other people can never keep still; they must always be acting and expressing themselves in the outside world. Karma yoga is the main path for these people. Others are much quieter and more introspective in nature; they tend to watch their mental reactions to life's situations. Here the way of raja yoga is recommended. Still other persons have a strong tendency to enquire about the nature of life; in a sense they are stubborn for they refuse to accept any answer unless it is based on personal experience. They should practise jnana yoga. Then there are those who, perhaps being a bit more down to earth, can relate to tuning up the forces of their mind and body (physical and subtle) to the best possible condition. In other words, to attain health and calmness of mind. These people should practise hatha yoga.

Actually, it is best to practise all the five main paths of yoga to a certain extent, with an emphasis on the path that is in keeping with the predominant aspect of your personality. It is this path that should be followed with the most zeal, for it will be in accordance with your nature. Swami Sivananda was a firm believer in what he called 'integral yoga', in which all aspects of the personality are channelled through performing a combination of these different paths. He said that one should: "Serve, Love, Give, Meditate, Realize". This encompasses the different aspects of being: action, devotion, introspection, benevolence, enquiry and body. Let us discuss these categories of yoga in turn.

Hatha yoga

We will deal with this path first because it generally precedes the other forms. In other words, to tread any path of yoga, physical, psychic and mental health is essential and these are the basic aims of hatha yoga. In fact, it is often regarded as the first part of raja yoga, for without the preliminary practice of hatha yoga, raja yoga becomes very difficult, if not impossible.

The Hindi word *hatha* means 'obstinate'. But the meaning of hatha yoga is not 'obstinate yoga', though some people might regard it as being so. The word *hatha* is composed of two syllables, namely *ha* and *tha*. *Ha* means the 'sun' and *tha* means the 'moon'. Yoga means communion. Thus hatha yoga means the harmony between the sun and moon aspects of our being. The right nostril is connected with the sun aspect; the left is associated with the moon aspect. The moon rules over the mental functions, while the sun controls the vital and physical functions. This applies to everyone and is a basic tenet of yoga. The two nostrils have a deeper association with the flow of prana within our being. It is this flow of prana that ultimately influences the mental and physical functions. If the moon flow is predominant, then one tends to think too much. If the sun flow is predominant there is a tendency towards extroversion and physical activity. Throughout the day we tend to operate either more mentally or more physically. This is a natural process. However, for perfect mental and physical balance the sun flow should

predominate for a total of about twelve hours and the moon flow for the other twelve hours in each day. This ensures a balanced personality – neither too much introversion nor too much extroversion. The balance of these two is essential and is the basic aim of hatha yoga. Not only this, but balance leads to perfect physical and mental health. Further, it is the period when the flow in both nadis is exactly the same (manifested by equal flow in both nostrils) that spontaneous states of meditation can arise.

In the ancient classical text, the *Gheranda Samhita*, hatha yoga is referred to as 'ghatastha yoga'. *Ghata* means a 'pot' or a 'vessel', representing the physical body. The word *stha* means 'contents'. Therefore, ghatastha is an analogy for the contents of the physical body, meaning the yoga of that which is contained within the physical body. The text continues: "The physical body is like an unbaked pitcher which dissolves itself if filled with water. When the pitcher is fired, then it becomes strong enough to contain water. In the same way the body becomes strong when it is fired or hardened by the fire of yoga (hatha or ghatastha)." (1:8) This is a perfect description of the basic aim and philosophy of hatha yoga.

We have already introduced you to some of the basic practices of hatha yoga, which can be roughly divided into different groups, as follows:

Shatkarmas are in the main concerned with cleansing the body. Many diseases are caused by the build-up of toxins within the body. These practices are the first step in eliminating these waste products, and thereby regaining perfect health¹.

Asanas are the physical postures of yoga. We have already introduced you to many of them, their rules and a few practices, so we will not go into any detail here². We will mention, however, that there is much controversy between the different schools of yoga as to whether asanas are actually a part of hatha yoga, raja yoga, tantra yoga or of all three.

Pranayama has also been fully discussed and a few practices have already been given³.

Mudras and bandhas are often classified with hatha yoga. Mudras are special physical positions of the body or parts of the body which induce deeper physiological, psychic and mental changes in one's being. Bandhas

are physical locks which perform the same function.

These are very basic definitions. The practices will be fully discussed later in the book⁴.

Health is the fundamental aim of hatha yoga. What is health? It is difficult to define. Some people think that good health is epitomized by rippling muscles, but this is not necessarily true, for many fitness fanatics suffer from chronic physical problems. are easily susceptible to infection and disease and are also weighed down with many mental problems. Often skinny looking people are far healthier than the Tarzan types. In a general sense, health can be defined as a combination of the following: resistance to infection, absence of disease, both mental and physical endurance, flexibility of mind and body, mental peace, perfect coordination and condition of all organs, muscles and nerves in the body and their control by the brain and spinal nerve centres, together with a perfectly functioning pranic body. Hatha yoga aims to bring about this state of health.

Hatha yoga is particularly popular with many people, for they can see tangible benefits from its practice. It is very easy to see improvement in physical health and to feel emotionally and mentally more calm than usual, and hatha yoga leads to these benefits in a reasonably short period of regular practice. However, at the same time it is important to understand or at least appreciate that health of the body and mind is a means to an end, not an end in itself. It is a method to master the mind and attain higher states of consciousness. To this end hatha yoga and other paths of yoga can be used. The basic aim of hatha yoga is to build a firm, strong, healthy body, because without this asset, one's activities and aspirations are severely curtailed.

Hatha yoga also ensures that there is free flow of prana within the psychic channels of the body. This is of prime importance for perfect physical and mental health as well as experiencing higher states of awareness⁵. Remember that although prana is not visible it does not mean that it is non-existent or a mere concept. For the sake of comprehension, equate prana with electricity. Electricity cannot be seen and scientists have never explained its nature, yet at the same time it is agreed that some form of energy exists which we label

electricity, and can be seen when we flick a switch and electrical gadgets work. Without the electrical supply there is no reaction. Similarly without prana our body would cease to function.

Hatha yoga aims at harmonizing prana in the body so that in turn the physical body will automatically become healthy and receptive to higher vibrations. The mind and prana are intimately linked together and so if the pranic body is tuned up, then the mind is automatically relaxed and harmonized; at least to a degree, for it is the mind that controls prana, not prana the mind. However, prana and mind are part and parcel of the same thing; the division between them is only arbitrary. Certainly we can say that a balanced pranic body implies vitality of both body and mind, for all these aspects are directly related to each other.

Hatha yoga treats the body as an instrument to be kept in the best possible condition. This is one of the reasons most other spiritual and religious systems fall down. They seem to ignore this important aspect of our being. If a musician wants to play a beautiful musical composition, it is essential that his instrument is in perfect condition. He would not dream of playing his masterpiece on a broken, battered violin. It is the same with the path to higher awareness. The essential prerequisite is a well-tuned body and mind.

At the same time, as we have already mentioned, one should not assume that hatha yoga is only to bring about mental and physical health. Hatha yoga involves awareness in many of its practices and as such is a means to meditation in itself. This does not imply that people who are sceptical of the concept of higher awareness should not practise hatha yoga for health reasons – far from it. But at the same time they should bear in mind the higher ideals of hatha yoga, which are clearly stated in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the classical textbook on this subject: "Those people who practise only physical exercises (in hatha yoga) without mental and spiritual aspiration will fail to achieve the best results."

In a sense yoga has a different aim to other methods or systems that concern themselves mainly with the body. These other physical systems aim to develop the body in one way or another so that it can be exhibited, or can

perform certain sports with a greater degree of perfection etc. They make the practitioner more concerned with his or her body. Hatha yoga, on the other hand, is exactly the opposite. It attempts to harmonize the body so that it can be forgotten or transcended. In this way one is less hampered by the body and associated ailments, and more able to dedicate oneself to mental and spiritual pursuits.

Karma yoga

This is the yoga of action, the system of attaining awareness through activity. It is performance of our daily work with constant awareness and at the same time without any expectation of reward. It is this living in the present which enables far more effective, efficient and powerful actions. By totally absorbing the self in the work at hand we tend to reduce the power of the ego. This is the essence of karma yoga, and results in less emotional and mental upsets in life. It helps to make the mind more calm and peaceful under any circumstances and more receptive to the practices of yoga. This in itself can lead to meditation. Karma yoga will be more fully discussed in later lessons⁶.

Bhakti yoga

This is the yoga of devotion. It is the channelling of emotions into devotion, directed towards a guru, deity or suitable object. In this way the emotions are given an outlet, instead of suppressing them or dissipating them in different directions. The bhakta absorbs himself completely in his object of devotion, losing his individuality or ego. Emotional and mental problems disappear, concentration increases and the path to higher awareness and self-realization is opened. A full discussion of bhakti yoga and its benefits will be given in Book II⁷.

Jnana yoga

This is the path of enquiry. It is not, as so many people say, the path of the intellect. It attempts to transcend the limitations of the intellect or logical faculties of each individual, so how can it possibly be the path of the intellect? Higher awareness can never arise through rational thinking. Jnana yoga is the path towards illuminative knowledge, and this is alogical – neither logical nor illogical. It transcends them both.

In this path one enquires about the essence of existence and one's true nature. Effort, concentration and total absorption in the enquiry are prerequisites for success in this path. Without these attributes, illumination will not take place. By illumination we do not mean stereotyped answers, but intuitive answers which cannot be spoken about. If one can talk about an illumination it usually has not occurred. This is the reason why so many great yogis have refused to talk about their highest experiences. They know it is impossible.

The path of jnana yoga is open for everyone, but at the same time few people are really ready for it. They have too many mental tensions and problems and are unable to relax. They dissipate their mental energies in a large number of different pursuits, and therefore lack the intensity of purpose to pursue their enquiries until they gain the answers in the form of revelations. As such, most people should follow alternate forms of yoga to clean out their minds and develop their power of concentration. When they progress in yoga they can turn to the path of jnana yoga. The subject of jnana yoga will be further outlined in Book III⁸.

Raja yoga

This is the path of introspection. It encompasses many other separate paths of yoga which we will briefly mention. It is the path in which one attempts to explore the different realms of the mind: conscious, subconscious, unconscious and beyond. The purpose is to become increasingly aware of these different aspects of being. Raja yoga progressively attempts to transcend the outer environment of the physical body, and direct the awareness to the inner environment. Each person has consciousness; either it can be directed outwards or it can be directed inwards. Either we can be conscious of the external surroundings or we can be conscious of the inner world. Usually our attention is on outer objects. If perception of the external is cut off, as is attempted in raja yoga, then the consciousness must be directed inwards. It has to go somewhere. When it goes inwards it starts to light up our inner existence and we begin to explore ourselves. We normally see only the surface of the ocean of the mind; we don't see what is below. If we dive into the

depths towards the seabed we would see the deeper aspects of the mind that are normally hidden from us. This is the aim of raja yoga in its many forms. We will briefly mention some of the main types:

Patanjali yoga

Patanjali yoga is often identified with raja yoga directly, for they are regarded as synonymous. However, for the sake of argument we will consider raja yoga as being the group name of all the different paths that are introspective in nature. The system of Patanjali yoga consists of eight steps or limbs which the aspirant must progressively master on the path to self-realization⁹.

1. *Yamas* (self-restraints)
2. *Niyamas* (self-observances)
3. *Asanas* (postures)
4. *Pranayama* (regulation of prana through breath control)
5. *Pratyahara* (disassociation of consciousness with the outside environment)
6. *Dharana* (concentration)
7. *Dhyana* (meditation)
8. *Samadhi* (identification with pure consciousness).

Kundalini yoga

This is a system of yoga concerned with the awakening of the pranic or psychic centres known as chakras, which exist within all of us. These chakras are centres of bioplasmic energy and are directly related to different levels of awareness⁵. In the body there are numerous chakras, but kundalini yoga concerns itself with six main ones which are located throughout the length of the spine. Kundalini yoga aims to awaken these chakras and thereby induce higher states of consciousness. In a sense it puts the 'cart before the horse'; in other words as one attains higher states of awareness, perhaps by practising other forms of yoga, then the associated chakra will automatically open. Kundalini yoga tackles this from the opposite direction. It tries to first open the chakras to induce the associated levels of awareness.

This force or power one attains in the form of higher awareness is symbolized by the kundalini, a serpent that is said to reside in the lower regions of the trunk. This form of yoga is also known as laya yoga.

Mantra yoga

Mantra yoga is the yoga of sound. Most people are very sadly ignorant of the power of sound, yet the ancient sages through personal experience realized that sound has incredible power to influence the mind and body as well as produce changes in the material world. The ancient yogis experimented with different combinations of sound and found that they could induce extraordinary changes within the mind – different sounds producing different effects. They called these special sounds mantras and they were handed down from generation to generation.

Mantra yoga uses the power of sound as a method of inducing introspection and subtle mental changes, and to evoke mental and psychic manifestations. A particular mantra is usually repeated over and over again either verbally or mentally, producing mental tranquillity, concentration and awareness of the inner processes of the mind. It is a powerful method of allowing meditation states to flower.

Mantra yoga is also known as japa yoga, though generally japa yoga is a more confined term¹⁰.

Dhyana yoga

Dhyana yoga is most often classified as a separate path of yoga. However, the word dhyana means meditation. So in a sense this type of yoga can refer to the aims and higher stages of all forms of yoga.

Kriya yoga

This is the yogic path of movement and awareness. It is a powerful system and is the subject matter of the third part of this book. The aim is to bring about awareness of the processes of the inner environment of man.

Summary

There are many other forms of yoga – shiva yoga, siddha yoga, samkhya yoga, buddhi yoga, sannyasa yoga, maha yoga and many more which we have not mentioned. They are excellent systems in themselves but they lie within the five main groups that we have outlined. There is, however, one path of yoga that seems to lie outside the main branches of yoga. It is called swara yoga. It doesn't really fit into any of the five main groups. It is concerned with relating the flow of prana

in the body with internal and external events. It is concerned with the flow of air through the two nostrils, like pranayama, but is also related to the position of the sun and the phases of the moon, the time of sunrise and so on. From basic rules laid down by swara yoga, it is possible to predict auspicious times to undertake certain types of work, marriage, meet friends, business associates, etc. It is a system for allowing one to know how to act in given circumstances to achieve the best out of life. In a sense it is in the same class of systems as palmistry, astrology, etc. which aim to guide people through their lives in a way to suit their personality and circumstances¹¹.

We emphasize again that one path should not in general be practised to the exclusion of the others. Choose a main path but supplement it to some degree by the practice of other paths. In fact an integration of all the paths would be ideal. This is summed up in the following verse by Swami Sivananda:

*Eat a little, drink a little,
Talk a little, sleep a little,
Mix a little, move a little,
Serve a little, rest a little,
Work a little, relax a little,
Study a little, worship a little,
Do asanas a little, pranayama a little,
Reflect a little, meditate a little,
Do japa a little, chant a little,
Write mantra a little, have satsang a little.*

This poem clearly indicates that the best approach to life is integration of all activities. This also includes yoga.

We have only briefly mentioned the main forms of yoga, for we are more interested in showing the interrelation between them and introducing their basic aims, than to delve into them deeply at this stage. These five paths cover every aspect of our being and as such are applicable to everyone. There is no one who cannot relate in some way or another to yoga.

Notes

- ¹ For further details on shatkarmas refer to Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2
- ² Asanas: Introduction – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 2
Asanas: Rules and Preparations – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 3
- ³ Pranayama: Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3.
- ⁴ For further details on bandhas refer to Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3
- ⁵ Prana: An Introduction – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3
Pranayama: Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3
- ⁶ Karma yoga: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1.
Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1
- ⁷ Bhakti yoga: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1
Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1
Part 3 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1
Part 4 – Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1
- ⁸ Jnana yoga – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1
- ⁹ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 2
- ¹⁰ For further details on japa refer to Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5
- ¹¹ For more details on swara yoga refer to Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Agnisar Kriya

Abdominal malfunctions are common ailments among many people. The causes are often due to lack of exercise and inadequate massage of the internal organs. Many of us spend long periods of time sitting motionless doing office work, studying, watching television and other activities that require little or no physical effort. This leads to laziness and sluggishness of the entire body, including the abdominal organs. For this reason, the organs become inefficient and unable to perform their basic functions properly, leading to general bad health, whether conspicuous or inconspicuous.

In the case of the abdominal organs, sluggishness leads to indigestion, constipation, kidney and liver problems and various other common ailments of the abdomen. Of course there may be other factors involved, but certainly inefficiency of the organs is a major one. Agnisar kriya is a powerful method of counteracting this condition, for it vigorously contracts and expands the abdomen, giving the internal organs the massage and exercise that they require in order to carry out their functions in the best way.

In various yogic practices to be introduced in this book, one requires reasonable control over the abdominal muscles and the ability to manipulate the front wall of the abdomen. Most people lack this ability. Agnisar kriya is an excellent preliminary practice to gradually develop effective control of these muscles, and at the same time, of course, it gives many other related physical benefits.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *agni* means 'fire'; *sara* means 'essence' and *kriya* means 'action'. Of course there is no fire, as such, in the stomach, but the essence or nature of fire can be compared to the digestive process. If the abdominal organs are not working properly, then the digestive fire smoulders. Digestion is not as good as it should be; the fire needs

to be fanned or stoked. In other words, the process of digestion needs to be kindled and aroused to encourage the best possible digestive power. Agnisar kriya does just this. It makes the digestive fire blaze.

Agnisar kriya is also known as *vahnisara dhauti*. The word *vahni* also means 'fire', and the word *dhauti* means 'cleansing action'. The practice cleans out the digestive system and stimulates digestion. In fact this practice cleans out impurities not only from the digestive system, but other important abdominal organs as well.

Scriptural references

Agnisar kriya is well known and discussed in the ancient yogic texts. The *Gheranda Samhita* says the following: "Contract the navel towards the spinal cord a hundred times. This agnisar kriya gives many benefits, removing diseases of the abdomen and stimulating the digestive fire. It is a technique unknown even to the devas (higher beings). The practice of agnisar kriya will result in a beautiful and healthy body." (1:19,20)

Very few details of the practice are given, for it is intended to be taught by a guru or teacher to his disciple with personal instructions. Of course, one should not assume that the text strictly means that you should contract your navel one hundred times. It means that you should practise as many times as possible without over-exerting yourself. Furthermore, don't take the text too literally when it says that the practice is unknown to higher beings. This merely implies that the practice is a good one but is rarely practised because few people know of it. The text also indicates that the ancient yogis were fully aware of the benefits of the practice.

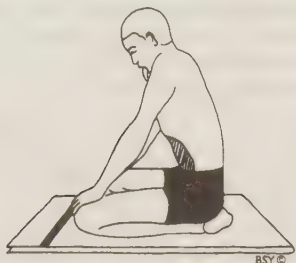
Posture

One can assume various postures to perform this practice:

1. Standing position
2. Vajrasana¹
3. Padmasana²

Those who are able should practise while sitting in vajrasana (or padmasana if they are familiar with it). Otherwise adopt a standing position, which is equally good.

AGNISAR KRIYA



Technique 1: in vajrasana

Sit in vajrasana. Separate the knees as widely as possible keeping the toes in contact with each other. Place the hands on the knees.

Arch the spine backwards and straighten the arms.

Bend the head slightly forward.

Open the mouth and extend the tongue.

The eyes can be open or closed, as you prefer.

Then contract and expand the abdomen while simultaneously breathing in and out.

This breathing should be passive; that is, it should only occur because you are accentuating the movement of the abdomen. The breathing should resemble the panting of a dog and must be in harmony with the associated abdominal movements.

It is important that the internal organs receive a good massage.

Therefore contract and expand the abdomen as much as possible.

Don't strain.

The movement of the abdomen should be rapid, but at the same time ensure that the contractions and expansions are as full as possible.

Don't do the practice over-rapidly, so that the movement of the abdomen is reduced and becomes superficial. This will reduce the benefits of the practice.

Pull in and push out the abdomen for a short period of time, until you feel a little fatigue.

This is 1 round.

Rest for a short time, then repeat.

Technique 2: in standing position

Stand with the legs about half a metre apart. Lean forwards and place your palms just above the knees.

The arms should remain straight throughout the practice.

Bend the knees slightly.

Look towards your abdomen.

Open your mouth and extend your tongue.

Then contract and expand the abdomen while breathing in and out, in the same way as described in technique 1.

Continue as long as you are able to without straining.

Take a rest and then repeat the procedure.

Technique 3: advanced form

This technique gives the greatest massage of the abdominal organs.

It can be practised in vajrasana, padmasana or a standing position.

It is similar to techniques 1 and 2, but the breath is held while pulling in and pushing out the abdomen.

Breathe in deeply.

Then exhale, emptying your lungs as much as possible by fully drawing in the abdomen.

Without breathing, try to push your abdomen outwards.

Then contract your abdomen again.

Repeat this process in quick succession as many times as you can while holding your breath. Be careful not to strain yourself by holding your breath too long.

Then breathe in. This is 1 round.

Rest until the breathing returns to normal.

When your breathing becomes normal again, repeat another round.

The time of breath retention should be gradually increased over a period of days and weeks.

Mistakes to avoid

Often agnisar kriya is done with only a slight movement of the abdomen. This is often due to pulling in and pushing out the abdomen too quickly. Try to regulate your practice so that the movement is reasonably rapid, yet simultaneously exaggerated.

Sometimes in stages 1 and 2 the breath is not synchronized with the movement. Try to

harmonize the breath with the movement and keep a constant rhythm throughout the practice.

Number of rounds and duration

Beginners may find this practice a little difficult because of lack of voluntary control over the abdominal muscles. Furthermore, you will quickly become tired because you are using your abdominal muscles far more than usual. Therefore, you must slowly and gradually develop and accustom the muscles over a period of time. At first contract and expand the abdomen no more than twenty five times before taking a short rest. Three rounds is sufficient. Practise this for a week or so.

When your muscles become stronger then you can gradually increase the duration of each round as well as the number of rounds. We leave the details of this to the discretion of the practitioner, for the choice will depend on individual capability.

Of course, the duration of each round in technique 3 will depend on how long you can hold your breath. We emphasize again that you should not strain. You will find that the duration of breath retention will automatically increase with practice.

Time of practice

Do not practise agnisar kriya with a full stomach. Wait until three or four hours have elapsed after a meal. The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast, preferably after going to the toilet. However, if you wish you can do this practice before going to the toilet to help induce a good bowel movement.

Limitations

Those people with high blood pressure, heart problems, ulcers and hernias are advised not to do this kriya.

Women who are pregnant should also refrain from doing the practice. However, they definitely should recommence it after childbirth to tighten up the abdominal and pelvic muscles and bring the internal organs back to normal.

Benefits

Agnisar kriya massages all the abdominal organs, strengthens the muscles and stimulates

the associated nerves, encouraging the best possible functioning of these organs. It promotes the correct secretion of digestive juices and thereby allows optimum assimilation of nutrients from the food that we eat. Furthermore, it prevents and removes various digestive maladies such as constipation, indigestion, hyperacidity, hypoacidity, flatulence and sluggishness of the liver, etc.

If a person has strong and efficient internal organs, he is far more able to avoid disease. Moreover, even if he mistreats his body the organs are easily able to cope with the situation and bring the body back into balance. Agnisar kriya strengthens the organs that lie in the lower part of the trunk. In this way it helps the individual to withstand the onslaught of disease and the general unhealthy conditions of everyday life. This is an important practice and we recommend everyone to try it on a regular basis.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

Both the abdomen and pelvis are important parts of the body, because it is here that the main organs of digestion, elimination and reproduction are situated. To maintain good health it is essential that these organs, together with the associated muscles and nerves, are kept in the best possible working condition. Many people suffer from different ailments, which are directly, or indirectly, caused by the poor condition of this neglected area of the body. Almost all asanas influence these organs, nerves and muscles in one way or another and regular practice of a selected number of asanas, supplemented by surya namaskara, will help to ensure their perfect functioning. The following three asanas are simple, yet they particularly influence this part of the body. They massage and stretch the organs themselves, strengthen the muscles and stimulate the nerves.

USHTRASANA (CAMEL POSE)

In truth we are not sure why this asana is called the camel pose. It is difficult to imagine. We can hazard a guess and say that it is because the thighs, trunk and head resemble the neck of a camel.

Ushtrasana is a reasonably simple asana which gives a wonderful stretch to the thighs, abdomen, ribcage and throat.

Technique

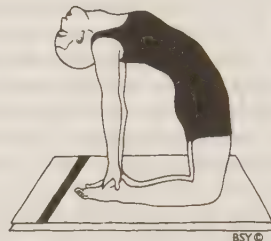
Place a blanket on the floor.

Kneel and adjust the knees and feet so that they are separated by the same width as the hips. This ensures firmness and balance throughout the movement.

The top of the feet should rest on the ground. In the starting position the thighs, trunk and head should all be vertical.

Lean backwards slightly.

Simultaneously turn to the right side and grasp the right heel with the right hand.



Straighten the arm, allowing the arm to support the weight of the body.

Then square the body and grasp the other heel with the left hand.

Tilt the head backwards as far as it is comfortable.

Try to relax your whole body, especially the back muscles.

By using the muscles of the back, gently push the thighs, pelvis and abdomen forwards; the back muscles should remain relaxed and the hands in contact with the heels.

The more the back muscles are relaxed, the further one will be able to push the body forward.

While making this movement, one will find that the compression of the back will increase, especially the lower back (lumbar vertebrae).

Be careful not to strain.

With practice and sufficient relaxation of the back muscles it will be possible to assume the final pose as shown in the picture above.

Make sure the leg muscles are relaxed.

The whole weight of the body should be supported by the legs and arms; at first this may not be possible but with practice it will be easily achieved.

The arms should anchor the shoulders to maintain the arch of the back.

In other words, the arms hold the shoulders down so that the flexion of the back can be accentuated; the arms do not hold the shoulders up.

Relax the muscles of the neck, legs, arms and back as much as possible.

The optimum relaxation of the back is important, for this allows the upper part of the body to sag under the influence of gravity; this applies the best possible flexion to the back, without any muscular resistance.

Breathe normally, allowing the arch of the back to accentuate during exhalation.

Remain in the final pose for as long as comfortable.

Then return to the starting position by tensing all the muscles and reversing the method we have already explained.

Ensure that the body is supported and pivoted about one arm as the opposite side of the body is swung forwards.

Do not hurry during this movement.

Beginners

People with stiff backs may find this asana a little difficult at first. If this is the case, start the asana with the balls of the feet on the ground. This raises the heels and allows them to be more easily grasped by the hands.

Some people will still find that they are unable to hold both heels at the same time. A method of gradually overcoming this problem is to merely reach back with one hand and grasp one heel. Hold this position for a second or so, release, twist the body and then grasp the other heel with the other hand. Repeat this alternate twisting movement a number of times. There should be no violent movements, only smooth, slow and relaxed ones. This simple exercise will help to loosen up the back so that one can eventually hold both heels.

Awareness and duration

Maintain awareness of breathing and relaxation of the whole body.

It is difficult to stay in the final pose for more than a few minutes. Aim at eventually maintaining the asana for up to two minutes. Initially, hold the final pose for no more than a few seconds, increasing the duration by a few seconds daily.

Sequence

This is a backward bending asana. As such it should follow or precede any of the asanas which bend the spine forwards.

Limitations

Persons with severe back ailments such as lumbago should not attempt this asana without expert guidance. Those who suffer from an enlarged thyroid should also take care.

Mistakes to avoid

Often people allow the weight of the body to be supported on the arms and heels in the final pose. Although this does not cause any harm, it greatly reduces the efficiency of the asana.

Another common error is to tense the back muscles, which prevents maximum flexion of the spine. Try to relax the muscles as much as you are able.

Do not breathe too deeply in the final position – the chest and abdomen are already stretched, which imposes restraint on breathing. Any attempt to breathe deeply could easily strain associated muscles.

Benefits

This asana applies a wonderful stretch to the whole chest and abdomen, at the same time imparting a thorough massage to the internal organs. As a result, it is useful for alleviating various abdominal ailments associated with the kidneys, pancreas, intestines, liver, etc.

Shallow breathing is often caused by inflexibility of the ribcage. Ushtrasana expands the ribcage and the associated muscles are made more supple. As a result deeper breathing is facilitated.

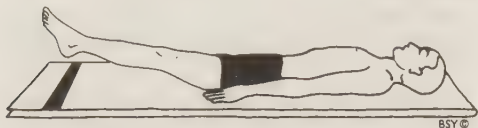
The spine is given a wonderful backward bend, loosening up the vertebrae and stimulating the spinal nerves. The shoulders are pulled backwards while the chest is pushed forwards, helping to correct rounded shoulders and a stooping back.

The front of the neck is fully stretched, applying a good massage to the nerves and organs in this region. In particular, the all important thyroid gland is regulated.

Those people who suffer from backache, neckache or general stiffness in the spine will gain relief through regular practice of this asana.

UTTHANPADASANA (RAISED LEGS POSE)

The Sanskrit word *utthan* means 'raised' and *pada* means 'foot'. Hence the name of the asana. It is a useful asana to perform as it helps to strengthen the abdominal muscles, remove wind and constipation.



Technique

Lie flat on the floor, face upwards. Place your legs together with the arms on each side of the body.

The arms should remain passive during the whole practice.

Close your eyes. Try to relax your whole body for a short period.

Breathe out deeply.

Then breathe in as deeply as possible.

Slowly raise your legs keeping them together and straight.

It is important that the arms remain as relaxed as possible. In other words, the arms should have no part to play in raising the legs.

The raising of the legs should be achieved by contraction of the abdominal muscles.

This is important for it ensures that the abdominal muscles are strengthened and the internal organs massaged.

Don't raise the legs too high; the feet should be held so that they are between 30 to 60 cms above the ground. If you raise the legs higher, then there is less contraction of the abdominal muscles and the asana loses much of its efficacy. Hold your legs in the final raised position while simultaneously holding your breath.

Don't strain but remain in the final pose for as long as you can without experiencing any discomfort.

Then slowly lower the legs as you breathe out. On reaching the floor completely relax the entire body.

When your breathing rate has returned to normal the asana can be repeated.

Beginners

This asana is deceptive for it looks far easier than it really is. On the other hand, with a little

practice it can be quickly mastered. Reasonably strong abdominal muscles are required to practise it properly (i.e. with the legs raised only a short distance off the ground). With the majority of people this is not the case and so there is normally some difficulty in performing this asana. Under these circumstances a simplified version can be performed. First of all the arms can be used to help raise and hold the legs in the final position. Secondly, the legs can be raised higher so that they make an angle of forty-five degrees or even more with the ground. This reduces the contraction necessary in the abdominal muscles.

However, the practitioner should progressively try to perform the asana so that the arms remain relaxed throughout the practice and the legs are only slightly raised off the floor. This should be the final goal, even if it takes a few weeks or more. In this way the asana will give its optimum benefits and the condition of the abdominal organs and muscles will greatly improve.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breathing should be normal while lying on the floor, followed by deep inhalation. Practise retention while raising and holding the legs in the final pose. Exhale while lowering the legs. Practise normal breathing while relaxing after completion of the asana.

Awareness should be on the abdomen and the breathing pattern.

Only hold the final position for as long as you can comfortably do so. Don't strain. Repeat the asana as many times as you wish, although three times is a reasonable number.

Sequence

This asana can be done at any time during your practice program.

Benefits

Utthanpadasana is an excellent asana for strengthening the abdominal muscles, massaging the internal organs, removing wind and eliminating constipation. In this respect it is particularly powerful when supplemented by *supta pawanmuktasana*¹. While *utthanpadasana* stretches the abdomen, *supta pawanmuktasana* compresses it. If you suffer from flatulence or constipation you should definitely practise these asanas one after the

other. In this context they can be practised at almost any time of the day (apart from after meals), but the best time is early in the morning before going to the toilet.

VYAGHRASANA (TIGER POSE)

This asana is so called because it emulates the stretching movement made by a tiger. A tiger, as well as various other animals, stretches its limbs generously and indulgently in a similar manner to the movements of the asana, especially after awakening from deep sleep.

Vyaghrasana is an excellent asana for exercising the digestive, eliminative and reproductive organs and the entire spine from top to bottom.

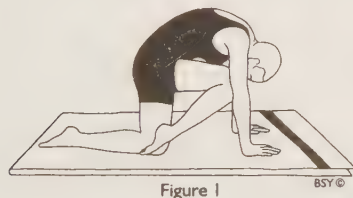
Technique

Kneel on the floor, feet and knees slightly separated.

Lean forwards and place both hands flat on the floor, palms downwards.

Adjust the position of the hands so that they are slightly apart and when your trunk is parallel with the ground the arms and thighs are vertical. The hands should be directly below the shoulders.

Relax your whole body.



Slowly bend the right leg and swing the thigh up to the chest.

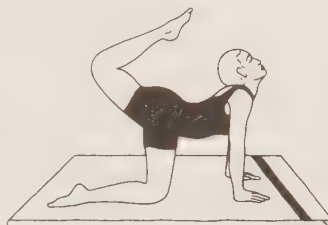
Simultaneously arch your back upwards and bend your head towards the upcoming knee while breathing out. The right foot should not touch the floor.

At the end of this movement try to bring your chin or nose in contact with the right knee while pressing the right thigh against the chest. Fix your eyes on the knee for a second or so. Hold your breath.

Then while inhaling slowly move your right knee backwards again. Don't lower your knee to the ground, but continue the swinging

movement so that the knee moves backwards and upwards behind the body, keeping the right foot off the ground. Simultaneously progressively stretch the right leg so that it is eventually straight and pointing away from the arms.

Then bend your right knee so that the right foot finally points in the direction of the back of the head.



From the position shown in figure 1 to the present position, the head should be slowly bent backwards and the spine arched downwards to attain the position in figure 2.

Try to bring the back of the head as near as possible to the right toes.

Hold your breath in this position for a short period.

Continue to hold your breath and straighten your right leg so that it points backwards again. Exhale while bending the right leg and returning to the position shown in figure 1. This is 1 round.

Do a few more rounds.

Then perform the same actions with the left leg, keeping the right leg fixed on the ground.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale while bringing the knee and thigh towards the chest. Hold the breath while pressing the thigh to the chest and the knee to the chin or nose. Inhale while swinging the knee backwards and stretching the leg. Hold the breath and simultaneously bend the leg so that the foot points to the back of the head. Hold this pose for a short period of time.

Awareness should be on the physical movement and the breathing pattern.

Repeat this asana five times with each leg.

Time of practice

This asana can be done at almost any time of the day except after meals and at any stage during your asana program.

However, if you feel like imitating the animals, and in many ways we have a lot to learn from them, try doing this asana on waking up in the morning. It is a useful practice for stretching the muscles and stimulating the blood circulation.

Benefits

Vyaghrasana flexes and loosens the entire spine by bending it alternately in both directions – backwards and forwards. It thereby tones the associated spinal nerves.

As we have already indicated, it also massages the lower organs of the body concerned with digestion, elimination and reproduction. It loosens up the legs and generally prepares the body for normal functioning, especially after sleep.

Women who suffer from sexual ailments like leucorrhoea should do this asana on a regular basis. It is very helpful, especially when supplemented by other asanas, in rectifying this type of problem. Women who have just completed childbirth should also do this asana to bring about normality and firmness in the relevant areas. Sufferers of sciatica have obtained some relief from the asana, but one should be careful.

Notes

¹Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2

Asanas: Pre-Meditative Exercises

Premeditative exercises are intended to prepare the body for meditative asanas, in which one remains in a specific sitting pose for a certain duration of time. This is the second group of such exercises given¹, and in the next lesson we will introduce all the important classical meditative asanas². It is necessary to describe these asanas at an early stage in this book so that you are able to participate effectively in the meditative practices described in the future, as well as the ones already covered. To practise these meditative asanas one must have reasonably supple legs; they are very difficult with stiff legs. For this reason we intend to recapitulate the relevant exercises that we have already discussed for loosening up the legs, and introduce you to a few more.

Regular and earnest practice of the following exercises will help to loosen up even the stiffest legs and help to prepare you to at least attempt some of the advanced meditation asanas².

Practices

The following exercises are excellent for loosening up the legs:

1. Ardha titali asana (half butterfly)¹
2. Kauva chalasana (crow walking)¹
3. Shroni chakra (hip rotation)¹
4. Poorna titali asana (full butterfly)
5. Kashtha takshanasana (chopping wood)
6. Vayu nishkasana (wind releasing pose)

These last three exercises we will cover in this topic. Actually all asanas loosen up the legs in one way or another, but the six that we have given are particularly useful for people initiating a serious practice of meditation.

POORNA TITALI ASANA (FULL BUTTERFLY POSE)

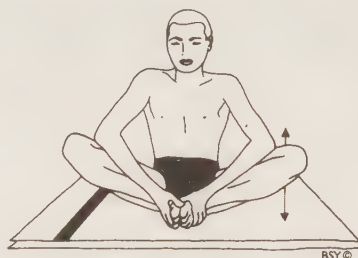
This practice is so called because the legs move up and down like a butterfly's wings, and when mastered it loosens the rigidity of the muscles and tendons in the groins which

prevent the knees from touching the ground during meditative asanas.

Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs extended in front of the body.

Bend the knees, lowering them out to the sides and place the soles of both feet in contact with each other. Don't strain, but try to slide the feet as near as possible towards the perineum keeping the soles in contact.



Stage 1

Hold the feet with the two hands.

Place both the elbows in contact with the inside tops of the thighs.

Then gently push the knees of both legs towards the ground, using the elbows as levers. After a short duration release the legs and allow them to rise upwards.

Again push the legs downwards.

Without strain, try to push the knees as close as possible to the ground.

Repeat this movement as often as available time will permit; up to 10 or 20 times is reasonable.

Stage 2

Release the hold of the hands on the feet.

Keep the legs in the same position.

Place the hands on the knees; some people will find this a little difficult, but try.

Relax the legs as much as you can.

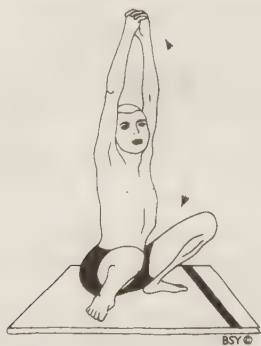
Using the arms push the knees up and down.



Try not to use the leg muscles in this practice. Do this as many times as you want; 20 to 40 times is a reasonable number if you have the time.

KASHTHA TAKSHANASANA (CHOPPING WOOD)

This may seem a difficult way to chop wood but it is certainly an excellent method of loosening up the legs. Many people will find this exercise quite difficult for it is very easy to topple backwards when raising the arms.



Technique

Assume a squatting position. Try to place the soles of the feet flat on the floor, with the knees fully bent and separated. Beginners, if they wish, can do this exercise with their backs close to a wall, but try to depend as little as possible on the aid of the wall for support.

Clasp the hands together. Straighten the arms in front of the body. Then while inhaling raise your straight arms as high as possible above the head (see accompanying picture). Exhale while lowering the arms.

This is 1 round. Practise as many times as you can – up to 10 or 20.

Don't strain, for this is a position that few people use in everyday life. However, in India, people habitually squat for long periods of time while eating, talking, working and many other activities.

In fact, many Indians are far more comfortable in a squatting position than sitting in a chair.

VAYU NISHKASANA (WIND RELEASING POSE)

As the name suggests this is an excellent practice for removing wind, and at the same time it stretches and loosens up the muscles of the legs.

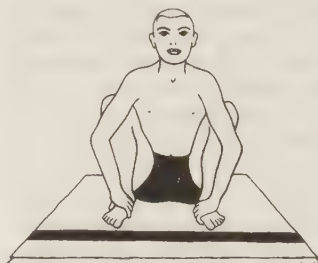


Figure 1

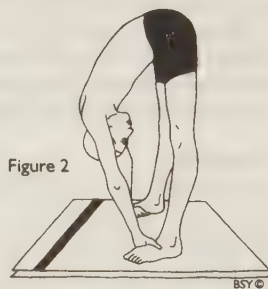


Figure 2

Technique

Assume a squatting position. Again if necessary sit with your back to a wall. Grasp the feet with the hands, keeping the arms inside the legs (refer to figure 1). Then inhale and raise your head.

Exhale and straighten the legs, while simultaneously pointing the top of the head towards the ground.

This is shown in figure 2.

The legs should be as straight as possible but without strain.

Maintain this pose for a short period and hold the breath.

Then while inhaling, bend the knees and return to the squatting position.

This is 1 round. Do up to 10 rounds.

Note: the hands must hold onto the feet throughout the practice.

Summary

Many people will find some of these practices a little difficult at first. Do not become discouraged, only do your best. With regular practice these six exercises will definitely loosen up your legs, especially when supplemented with other asanas.

Practise these exercises whenever you have the time. They can be done at any time (except directly after meals) and in any place. Aim to do all six, for they each have a part to play in making your legs more supple. The more you practise them the more likely you are to achieve the flexibility needed to eventually master the classical meditative asanas. Remember, an essential factor in loosening up the legs is your mental attitude. If you attempt these six exercises and find that your legs are too stiff, don't immediately despair and stop the practices. In this case you have almost defeated yourself before you have begun. No matter how stiff your legs, you must believe that with practice and time they will eventually become supple.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Ujjayi Pranayama and Khechari Mudra

Most techniques based on tantric yoga use a pranayama practice called *ujjayi*, supplemented by a tongue lock called *khechari mudra*. Though extremely simple to perform, this combination contributes a lot to the efficacy of meditation techniques. For this reason we are explaining them to you at an early stage in this book.

Furthermore, *ujjayi pranayama* and *khechari mudra* can be immediately incorporated into the meditation techniques of *anuloma viloma* and *prana shuddhi*¹.

UJJAYI PRANAYAMA (THE PSYCHIC BREATH)

This is a unique form of pranayama in which one makes a hissing or whispering sound in the region of the throat. It is far easier to do than to describe.

Technique

Sit in any comfortable position. Any position can be taken but a meditation asana is preferred².

Fold the tongue into *khechari mudra*.

Close the eyes.

Relax the body, holding the neck and head upright.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Partially close the glottis in the throat.

This is done by slightly contracting the throat.

If this is done properly you will simultaneously detect a slight contraction of the abdomen.

We are a little reticent about writing this fact down for it is so easy for the practitioner to misunderstand and make a special point of contracting the abdominal muscles. This should not be done. If you merely contract the glottis you will automatically feel a slight pulling sensation in the region of the abdomen. As you breathe you should hear a continuous sound emitted from the throat. It should not be very loud, audible to yourself but inaudible

to another person unless he sits very close to you. This sound is caused by the friction of the air as it passes through the restriction that you have made in the glottis by contraction. The sound will be similar to the gentle sound that a baby makes while sleeping. This form of breathing, together with *khechari mudra*, is known as *ujjayi pranayama*.

General advice

It is possible that the reader is still not sure that he is doing this practice correctly. A similar contraction of the throat is obtained if you whisper aloud. Try to whisper loud enough so that a person can hear you a few metres away. This should help indicate the method of contracting the glottis. However, this is only intended as an illustration and whispering should not be incorporated into *ujjayi pranayama*.

Mistakes to avoid

Many people contort their facial muscles when they do *ujjayi*. This is unnecessary. Try to relax the face as much as possible.

Do not over-contract the throat. The contraction should be slight and applied continuously throughout the practice.

KHECHARI MUDRA (TONGUE LOCK)

This is a very simple practice that is also known as *nabho mudra*. Actually there is a far more difficult form of *khechari mudra* that involves various surgical operations to the tongue, lasting over a period of months. The practice we give here, however, can be done by everyone without any preparation or practice.

Technique

Roll your tongue upwards and backwards, so that the lower surface lies in contact with the upper palate.

Stretch the tip of the tongue backwards as far as is comfortable.

Don't strain, for you will be required to hold this position for the duration of ujjayi pranayama.

At first you will feel almost immediate discomfort, but with practice you will find that you can perform khechari mudra for longer periods of time.

When you feel discomfort, release the tongue for a second or so and then again repeat the tongue lock.

This mudra should be incorporated into ujjayi pranayama.

Awareness

This will depend on the meditation practice being performed. However, part of one's awareness should be on the sound emerging from the throat and the corresponding inhalation and exhalation.

Reasons for the practice

In the neck there are two remarkable organs called the carotid sinuses situated on each side of the main artery supplying the brain with blood, in front of the neck and just below the level of the jaws. These small organs help to control and regulate blood flow and pressure. If there is any fall in blood pressure, it is detected by these two sinuses and the relevant message is sent directly to the brain centre. The brain responds immediately by increasing the heartbeat and contracting the arterioles (tiny blood vessels), thus raising the pressure to its normal level. Any rise in blood pressure is also detected by the carotid sinuses, which inform the brain and the opposite steps are taken to rectify the situation.

Tension and stress are associated with high blood pressure. Ujjayi pranayama by applying a slight pressure on these sinuses in the neck causes them to react as though they have detected high blood pressure, with the result that the heartbeat and the blood pressure are reduced below normal. One becomes physically and mentally relaxed. This is the reason why ujjayi is so important in many meditation practices. It induces overall relaxation, which is essential for success in meditation.

Khechari mudra accentuates this pressure in the throat region and consequently on the two carotid sinuses. The reader can experiment

for himself by doing ujjayi firstly without khechari mudra and then with, and compare the difference in pressure.

Ujjayi pranayama is a simple practice but it has many subtle influences on the body and brain, both physical and mental as well as bioplasmic. The slow and deep breathing results in immediate calmness of the mind and body, as well as bringing the bioplasmic body into harmony. Furthermore, the sound at the throat tends to soothe one's whole being. If one remains aware of this sound for a reasonable period of time to the exclusion of other thoughts, then one will feel immediate benefits.

Benefits

As we have said, this practice is mainly used in conjunction with meditation techniques, and it is usually practised in this way. However, those people who merely want to relax themselves can do ujjayi in conjunction with a meditation practice or shavasana³.

People who suffer from insomnia will find it especially useful. Those who suffer from high blood pressure will find that ujjayi helps to reduce the pressure, even if only for a short period of time at first. However, during this period the body and mind will gain some much needed rest.

In general we can say that ujjayi is helpful for all ailments that originate from nervousness or chronic stress.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Shavasana: Part I – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;
Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Meditation: Practices for Visualization

Many kriya yoga and meditation practices require mental visualization; this is the ability to create mental images at will. Without this skill the practices have less impact and fail to yield their highest fruits. Although not all kriya yoga and meditation techniques require mental visualization, most of them do in one form or another, so it is necessary for future practices to develop this important skill. For this reason, throughout the rest of this book we will describe various practices enabling the reader to gain competence in mental visualization.

Often meditation practices are taught to people who do not have the capability to visualize. Because they lack the necessary preliminary skill to gain the benefits their meditation practices become superfluous. Everyone has the ability to create mental images of objects at will, but like many of our powers it remains dormant.

A few people do develop this power of inner visualization, but they are generally people who must integrate it in their work, such as artists. Most of us spend our lives totally absorbed in the outside world and neglect our inner environment. It is only when we spend some time introspecting that we can develop our vastly untapped potential, including the faculty of mental visualization.

Because this subject is so very important, we therefore ask you to spend a few minutes every day practising inner visualization, beginning with the technique we will introduce you to in this lesson. At first you may find the practice a little difficult. This is to be expected, for as we have already explained most people have unfortunately neglected this aspect of the mind, but with perseverance you will achieve success. At first it seems impossible that a baby will eventually walk and run with sureness and steadiness when one sees him make his first few valiant, but faltering, attempts to stand up. Though the mother and father may despair,

the baby does not, because of this success is attained. It is the same with our efforts to develop the ability to create inner images at will. If you despair then you will defeat yourself before even starting. Be undeterred and determined like a baby. You cannot fail to accomplish your goal.

RECALL BY REVISUALIZATION

This technique is primarily intended to develop the ability to recall past events and to recreate them visually. Everyone remembers past events; in fact the mind is continually bombarded by them, especially highly unpleasant or pleasant ones. However, this process of remembering is generally imposed upon us; it occurs spontaneously and happens without conscious effort. Further, we rarely relive the past in the form of images, but generally in the form of thoughts and feelings. This practice requires conscious effort to recall specific past events in the form of mental images. One tries to watch a past event as though watching a television screen.

Time and place

This technique can be performed in almost any place and at any time. However, the atmosphere should be quiet and conducive to introspection. Furthermore, it should be such a time when you are not busy carrying out some form of work. For example, don't try to do this practice if you are driving your car down the main street.

If you are sitting in a bus or a train or if you are a passenger in a car then you can practise it. In other words, practise in any situation where your mind is unoccupied with the affairs of the world.

Technique

You can create your own technique for there are endless possibilities.

Each time you practice this method choose a new situation to recall and revisualize. The following are a few suggestions:

Practice 1

Remember a walk which you took recently beside the river. You are alone.

Keeping your eyes closed, try to mentally create the scenery that you saw.

Visualize in front of your closed eyes the river and the footpath, the trees and the grass, the fish and the birds.

As you walk try to see all these objects pass your vision.

Create the picture as vividly as you can and as close as possible to the scenery that you actually encountered.

View the scene as a whole but also try to discern the individual objects: the branches of the trees, the expressions on the faces of the people you met coming in the opposite direction.

Recall, visualize and relive every detail.

Practice 2

Imagine that you are driving your car or riding your cycle to a friend's house. Visualize the route and the cars that you overtake or meet. See the pedestrians, the colour of the sky and feel the sunshine warming your body. Visualize as closely as possible every detail as you actually saw it.

Practice 3

If you are reading a book, close your eyes and try to see a clear picture of the situation and environment that the book is attempting to describe and convey to you.

Practice 4

Sit quietly in a room and study the furniture and objects around you. Observe carefully, trying to see the positioning and nature of your surroundings.

Then close your eyes and visualize the outer environment in as much detail as you can remember.

General summary

As we have pointed out, there is no end to the scenes that you can recreate – the only limit is your inventiveness. We emphasize again that these practices may be a little difficult in the

beginning, but they will become easier and easier as you open up your inner faculties. These practices will also develop your memory power as well as increase your awareness and sensitivity to your surroundings. Most people walk around with their eyes closed, with little awareness of what is happening around them, until they suddenly come into conflict with the environment, when they are forced to become alert. If we were asked to remember what we had seen on our journey home from work, for example, how many of us could give a comprehensive description? Not many. This practice develops awareness of our surroundings.

But remember, the important purpose of this technique is to unfold your capacity to create mental images and to dispose of them at will.

Daily Practice Program

An integrated sadhana program should contain asanas, pranayama and meditation techniques practised in the correct sequence. To be able to gain optimum benefits it is essential that these categories of practices be performed for a reasonable period of time daily. We don't expect you to be overwhelmed by yoga practices, but at the same time at this stage a minimum of half an hour should be assigned every day to these techniques. In fact more time is preferred.

For those who have time we have now included a one and a half hour program. This can either be done at one time in the morning

or split into two and practised both during the morning and the evening. In this way the morning practice will set you up for the day ahead and the evening practice will slow you down, so that you have a good, refreshing night's sleep. The practitioner must use his discretion in this respect.

Keep on with the practices of nadi shodhana pranayama described in Lesson 5¹.

Anuloma viloma and prana shuddhi² should continue, but supplement them with ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra.

Practise the visualization technique whenever you have spare time.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit you	8
Shavasana	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Poorna Titali Asana	—	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	3
Kashtha Takshanasana	—	3
Vayu Nishkasana	10 rounds	3
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Vyaghrasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	5
Stage 2	—	10
Meditation practice: Anuloma Viloma		
and Prana Shuddhi with Ujjayi		
Pranayama and Khechari Mudra	—	23
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	7
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	—	2
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Vyaghrasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each side	2
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	3
Stage 2	—	7
Meditation practice: Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi with Ujjayi Pranayama and Khechari Mudra	—	14
		60

Program 3: duration ¼ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	—	2
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Vyaghrasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	3
Stage 2	—	4
Meditation practice: Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi with Ujjayi Pranayama and Khechari Mudra	—	11
		45

Program 4: duration ½ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	—	3
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	3
Stage 2	—	6
		30

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

Lesson 7

There was a man who was blind from birth. Someone told him about the beauty of the sun. He was very interested but very sceptical. He said: "What is this light that you talk about? I have no conception or idea about it. Can I hear the light with my ears?" His companion said: "No, of course not. The light does not make any sound." Then the blind man asked, "Then let me taste it." "Oh no," said his friend, "you can't taste light." "All right," said the blind man, "then let me feel the light." "That also is impossible," said his companion. "And I suppose I can't smell it also," said the blind man a little cynically. "Correct," said his friend. "Then how can I believe in such a thing as light? For me it is a myth, a castle in the sky." His friend thought for some time and then had an idea. "Let us go and see Lord Buddha. I hear that he is giving satsang nearby. He surely will be able to make you experience and know the meaning of light."

So they visited Buddha. They asked how the blind man could be made to understand the meaning of light. Buddha was very sharp in his answer. He said: "Not even one hundred Buddhas can explain the meaning of light to this man. The experience of light is a personal experience." But the Buddha understood that the eye defect was superficial and that it could be cured by a simple operation. He therefore arranged that the blind man visit a person who could correct his eyesight. After some time the man was able to see. He saw light for the first time. Through his own experience he was able to understand the meaning of

light. He exclaimed: "Now I believe that light exists. I can see the sun, the moon, the trees and so many other things. But it is only possible through my own experience. All the descriptions that people gave me could never convince me, nor could their descriptions convey the meaning of light. It is only through showing me the method of regaining my sight that I am able to understand from personal experience." The man was overwhelmed with joy. His whole life was changed.

This man's dilemma is similar to the dilemma that most people have with spiritual life. Many people hear God is this, and God is that. Thousands and thousands of accounts are given of spiritual experiences. But these descriptions are actually useless, like the description of light to the blind man was also useless. The only thing that is useful is the explanation of how you can gain spiritual experience for yourself. It was only when the blind man took steps to remove his eye defect that he was eventually able to see. It is the same with spiritual life. The multitude of descriptions of spiritual experiences, God, etc. are useless. The most positive step that you can take is to begin your sadhana, to find out the experiences for yourself. You too will find the LIGHT – the spiritual light from your own experience, in the same way that the blind man eventually discovered the light for himself when his eyesight was restored. And when you have your own experience then explanations are not necessary. They become totally superfluous.

Diet and Digestion

A great many disorders of the body are directly connected with malfunctioning of the digestive system. In this way the digestive system has a direct influence on one's daily life. You must have noticed for yourself that when you are experiencing digestive trouble you tend to be pessimistic and easily irritated. Conversely, a healthy digestive system allows one to be optimistic and cheerful. In short, the digestive system can help or prevent us enjoying life to the full. It is for this reason that yoga stresses the importance of maintaining the best possible health of this system. We do not intend this book to become a textbook on physiology, but we think that with a greater knowledge you will tend to treat the body with more respect. Moreover, a better understanding will help you to participate more actively and joyfully in your daily life, which of course is one of the main aims of yoga. For this reason we will briefly discuss the functions of the digestive system.

Digestive system – how it works

The food we eat cannot be absorbed directly into the body. It must first undergo a process of conversion into substances which can be directly conveyed into the bloodstream – the carrier and distributor of our foods throughout the body. This process is called digestion. (For a full understanding of the following text, refer to the diagram of the digestive system included overleaf.)

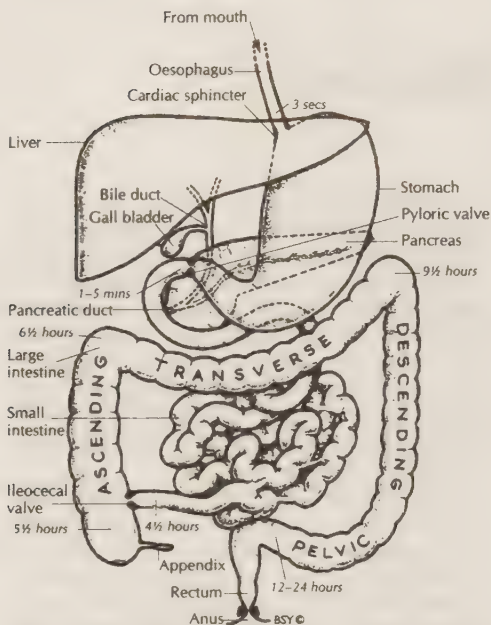
Digestion begins when food enters the mouth. The role the mouth plays in digestion is twofold: it physically breaks down the food into smaller fragments through the act of chewing while simultaneously secreting saliva through the salivary glands. The quantity of saliva secreted depends on the taste and look of the food, as well as on appetite. However, normally during the day one to two litres of saliva are secreted. Saliva contains the enzyme ptyalin, which starts to break down the starches present in the food into simpler forms of

carbohydrates known as sugars. Saliva also contains bicarbonate, which neutralizes acids within the stomach. Many people take bicarbonate of soda to relieve hyperacidity, yet if enough time was given to allow a sufficient secretion of saliva there would be no need for such remedies. Therefore, for a good digestion, slow eating and adequate chewing are important to allow the saliva to complete its function properly as well as increasing one's enjoyment of food.

After the food has been chewed sufficiently it passes through the throat (pharynx) to the food pipe (oesophagus). From there it is pushed down to the stomach by a series of rhythmic waves known as peristalsis. At the entrance to the stomach lies the cardiac sphincter, which allows the food to pass into the stomach.

The stomach when empty is about the size of your hands held palm to palm. Its walls are much thicker than any other part of the digestive tract. The stomach is designed to knead and churn the food with the gastric digestive juices, which are secreted by the millions of glands lining the stomach wall. These gastric juices are mainly comprised of the enzymes pepsin and hydrochloric acid, which are responsible for the breakdown of proteins. Rennin, which is secreted in less quantity, coagulates or curdles certain types of foods (such as the caseinogen of milk solids) so that they can be exposed for a longer period of time to the action of the digestive juices. Another important enzyme present in the gastric juices is pepsinogen, which terminates the action of the saliva. Together with hydrochloric acid, it also destroys germs which might be present in the food. The amount of gastric juices secreted depends on the amount of food consumed as well as the person's appetite. Tasteless, monotonous food produces little gastric juices, whereas pleasant, tasteful food encourages abundant secretions of these juices.

The Digestive System



Given figures denote time taken for first particles of food eaten to reach that point

However, on an average several litres a day are used. An average meal requires about 800 cc of gastric juices to be secreted from the stomach walls. This is not all released during meals; about 200 cc are secreted while eating and the remainder during the subsequent time that the food remains in the stomach.

The length of time that solid food stays in the stomach varies from two to six hours, depending on the nature of the food. Fats are more difficult than proteins and carbohydrates, and therefore remain in the stomach longer. Water and other liquids do not stay in the stomach for more than a few minutes. They pass almost immediately into the small intestine and are quickly absorbed into the bloodstream.

From the stomach the food gradually passes into the small intestine through the pyloric valve in a semi-liquid form called chyme. The first section of the small intestine is called the duodenum. Within the duodenum further digestive juices are mixed with the food from various glands within the gastrointestinal

system. The pancreas is the most important of these glands. The pancreatic secretions contain powerful enzymes including amylase, lipase and trypsin which are capable of digesting all types of foodstuffs – proteins, fats and carbohydrates. The pancreas does not function properly unless the food has already been sufficiently mixed with hydrochloric acid from the stomach. This is why some people who secrete insufficient hydrochloric acid fail to digest their food properly. About 600 cc of pancreatic juices are used every day.

Another important gland in the digestive system is the liver, which is the biggest single gland in the body. It is primarily concerned with the storage of food after it has been absorbed by the blood. It changes and stores the food in the form of glycogen. When energy or nutrition is required in any part of the body, the glycogen is converted into glucose (blood sugar) and discharged into the bloodstream for distribution. It also aids the pancreatic juice, lipase, in breaking down the fats. It performs this function by producing a clear, golden-coloured liquid called bile which is stored in the gallbladder, where it becomes more concentrated. This liquid not only aids the pancreatic juices but also helps to keep the food moving in the small intestine by stimulating the peristalsis.

The walls of the small intestine look and feel like velvet. It is lined with hundreds of thousands of hair-like nodules called villi which contain tiny blood vessels. They increase the surface area of the small intestine so that the nutrients in the chyme can be easily absorbed by the bloodstream and carried to the liver for storage. A further feature of the villi is their constant motion, which progressively moves the food along the intestinal tract. In this manner, food is allowed to come into contact with the different types of enzymes secreted by small glands which are also embedded in the intestinal walls. These enzymes include lactose, maltose, enterokose and sucrose, all having various functions to perform. Minerals and vitamins are also absorbed into the body from the small intestine.

In the intestinal walls are various muscles which relax and contract when stimulated by special nerves during what is termed intestinal peristalsis. During the digestion process, the small intestine is in constant motion under

the action of this peristalsis and the food is progressively moved along the intestinal tract and brought into contact with the enzymes and villi.

The term small intestine is confusing for the total length is over six metres. The word small refers to the smaller diameter when compared to the large intestine, which is only one and a half metres long. Food must traverse the whole length of the small intestine undergoing great changes and having the bulk of its nutrients absorbed into the bloodstream.

The chyme completes its journey through the small intestine and passes into the large intestine by way of the ileocecal valve. This valve regulates the flow of the chyme to the large intestine by preventing the small intestine emptying too quickly. At the same time it prevents any chyme from going back into the small intestine. At the point of entering the large intestine, the chyme contains mainly waste products (undigested food) and water. The water is largely absorbed in the large intestine to prevent dehydration of the body. The remaining waste matter proceeds to the rectum where it is eliminated from the body in the form of stool. This completes the process of digestion.

How to eat

As we have already shown, the digestive system is one of the most dynamic of all operations taking place within the human body. The system digests virtually anything edible providing enough time is allowed to enable the individual organs to carry out their inter-related duties. The digestive tract has a unique capability of secreting the exact combination of juices required for a particular mixture of foods. However, it must be emphasized that it can only successfully complete this process providing it is not hampered by the presence of great quantities of food eaten too quickly. Therefore eat slowly. In this way the body receives more nutrition from the food and you will enjoy your meal to a greater extent.

Here are some more suggestions to bear in mind:

1. Always take small mouthfuls.
2. Non-fried solid food should be chewed about thirty times; fried foods a little longer.
3. Try to keep general conversation to a minimum until the end of the meal.

4. Try to eliminate all thoughts of difficulties or problems from your mind during the meal. Calmness is conducive to good digestion, whereas tension and anger result in indigestion.

These suggestions may seem too demanding at the outset, and we agree. We don't intend this advice to become strict practice; however, we do feel that the benefits to be secured from these suggestions are sufficient to warrant not only a mention here, but also application at your dinner table.

Nutrients and their role in the body

Food can be divided into four general categories as follows:

1. *Carbohydrates and fats* provide our body with its energy requirements. The greatest amount of energy consumed goes into maintaining the correct body temperature. In fact, about seventy five percent of the energy in the body is required for this purpose, depending on the climate. The remaining energy is used by the muscles throughout the body, whether for the internal organs such as the heart, lungs, etc., or for the outer limbs such as the arms or legs. Fats also form protective layers which shield the delicate body organs from injury and allow storage of energy for future use. However, over-consumption of these foods leads to overweight. Butter and oils are almost pure fat, while refined sugar is practically one hundred percent carbohydrate. This latter category also includes food such as potatoes, rice and bread, which are predominantly carbohydrate, containing very little fat.

2. *Proteins* are the remarkable materials from which new cell tissues are built. Proteins are needed to repair worn-out tissues, as well as being essential to growth and muscular development. They are also necessary for the production of special substances that build up the body's immunity. There are large numbers of different proteins, all of which perform a definite role. Proteins are needed by everyone, but are required in greater quantities during childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation, or any time the body is constantly expending a lot of energy.

Proteins are an essential part of our diet and are abundantly present in such foods as milk, cheese, meat, fish, eggs, grains, beans, lentils, nuts, etc.

3. *Mineral salts* are yet another category of the essential elements required by the body. They are present in minute quantities but are nevertheless vital in the maintenance of correct body functioning. The kinds of mineral salts present in the body are numerous and varied, with each carrying out diversified functions. Some, such as phosphorus and calcium, are necessary for the building of strong teeth and bones. Phosphorus is also essential in the functioning of the brain cells. These two minerals are found in green vegetables, cheese, soya beans, potatoes and fish.

Iron, which is needed in greater quantities by women than men, is important in the production of haemoglobin, a protein in the blood cells. Without iron the blood is unable to transport oxygen throughout the body and so unable to perform its duties. The best sources of iron are meat, eggs, raisins, spinach, whole grain cereals, liver, apricots and potatoes.

In the body there are only a few grains of iodine, yet it is one of the most important minerals. The majority of iodine absorbed by the body is used by the thyroid glands in the production of thyroxine, which is essential in regulating the body metabolism. It also directly controls the growth rate of the body and as such is especially needed during pregnancy, childhood and adolescence. Iodine is found in iodized salt, seafood and vegetables.

Salt in the form of sodium chloride is also essential for the maintenance of the normal acid-base balance in the body. Without it we could not live. Remember, however, that too much salt tends to raise the blood pressure and causes swelling in the legs. So a moderate amount of salt is recommended, although during warm weather the intake should be raised.

4. *Vitamins* are the fourth and last category in our list, but far from the least important. At the same time, a great deal of uncertainty of the function of vitamins is held by scientists and laymen alike. The specific way in which vitamins work is not positively known but it is widely believed that they act as a catalyst for numerous chemical reactions within the body. We will briefly discuss the role of the different vitamins.

Vitamin A is needed by all important organs of the body. It is essential for the health of

the respiratory, digestive and urinary tracts. It keeps the mucous membranes of the nose, throat and windpipe strong and healthy, helping to prevent colds and other infections of this region.

Vitamin A is also concerned with the growth and development of the body and aids in reproduction and lactation. It keeps the skin smooth and clear and is essential for keenness of vision. When this vitamin is absent all tissues suffer. The skin becomes thick and rough, the eyes become dull and lustreless, and infections commonly occur over the entire body. The best sources of vitamin A are cream, butter, whole milk, egg yolk and carrots, together with numerous other fruits and vegetables.

Vitamin B complex consists of more than a dozen different vitamins. Some are required for the transference of energy in the cells, while others are used in the formation of red blood cells. One of the most important is thiamine (vitamin B1), which is concerned with the nerves and muscles. Neither can work properly if there is a deficiency of thiamine. Without sufficient quantities of thiamine the body would be in a perpetual state of aches and pains. It is most prevalent in liver, brewer's yeast, peanuts, whole grain cereals, meat and eggs.

Riboflavin is another important member of the vitamin B complex. It is necessary for the maintenance of healthy skin and eyes, but possibly its most important function is in the production of enzymes that help to digest food. Niacin, another member of this group, is also important to the digestive system. These elements of vitamin B complex are found in liver, eggs, milk, cheese and whole grain cereals.

Vitamin C is the great healing vitamin of the body. It is essential for building bones, maintenance of the walls of the smaller blood vessels, strengthening the teeth and gums, and in aiding the absorption of iron from the digestive tract. Vitamin C is also required by the body in large quantities during disease. It is found abundantly in fresh fruits, leafy vegetables, potatoes and tomatoes.

Vitamin D is necessary for the development of strong healthy bones. Its chief function is to maintain the correct balance between calcium and phosphorus in the body. Its deficiency

causes a disease called rickets, during which the bones become soft and pliable. It can be obtained from milk and eggs, but is unique in that the body produces its own supply by the interaction of the sun and the natural skin oils. The body therefore produces much of its own vitamin D and does not depend on food to supply its requirements.

Vitamin E is still a mystery to modern scientists, but it is believed to influence the reproductive functions and muscular activities of the body. It is contained in whole grain cereals, green vegetables, coconut oil and other vegetable oils.

Vitamin K is necessary for the process of blood clotting and is found in green vegetables, soya beans, tomatoes and eggs.

There are over twenty known vitamins and the ones we have mentioned are the most important. You will notice that these vitamins are present in a great variety of foods; therefore it is not necessary to worry about your vitamin intake. If you eat a sensible mixed diet it is a certainty that you will never be deficient in vitamins. The same is true for all essential requirements in the body, for a healthy body has the ability to transform one type of foodstuff into another as required. Many yogic practices, especially surya namaskara and pranayama, increase the efficiency of this transformation process. A person who is able to gain control of his system can live on a simple diet and transform it internally to other substances as his body requires.

Remember fats and carbohydrates give energy; proteins are mainly for growth and maintenance; minerals and vitamins are for protection, control and regulation of biological processes.

Food and preparation

In order to receive the greatest possible benefits from the foods you buy, it is preferable to avoid over-refined foods such as white rice, flour and white sugar. Nature has provided us with all the nutrients we need, so why buy artificial and adulterated foods? There are also several preparation hints that we can offer to enable you to obtain the most from your food. However, we stress that you should not become too fanatical in the following of food rules in general, but rather treat them as you do your cooking – in other words, don't overdo it!

1. Rinse off surface dirt, but do not scrub too hard to avoid washing away all the nutrients in the skin.
2. Cook vegetables in as little liquid as possible.
3. Save the liquid to make soups or gravy etc.
4. Steaming or baking vegetables is better than boiling or frying away their nutritional value.
5. Do not overcook vegetables.
6. When frying use as little oil as possible.

Remember, good and thoughtful food preparation is also essential for good digestion in a direct manner. Tasteless, monotonous and badly prepared food does not stimulate the appetite and the salivary and gastric glands secrete less juices than required.

Better alternatives

The following chart will enable you to avoid foods that are either detrimental to digestion or processed so that they lose their prana and nutritional value.

This chart is solely for your guidance. If you are unable to obtain these foods do not worry; they are only preferred foods, not essentials.

Foods to avoid	Foods to use
Denatured foods: white flour, white bread, cakes and buns; polished white rice.	Whole wheat, barley, rye or corn flour bread; whole or partially polished rice
White sugar, sweets, jam, sweet syrups, fruit in syrups, light treacle, heavily sugared drinks and glucose drinks.	Honey, brown sugar, molasses, black treacle; fresh fruit.
Fats and oils of animal origin; saturated acid fats.	Vegetable oils and clarified butter
Heat treated, canned foods; processed foods in which artificial sweeteners, flavourings and chemical preservatives are used (always read the small type on labels before purchasing).	Fresh foods, naturally processed foods; processed foods like dried fruits or lentils, organically grown products.

Summary

With the advent of scientific knowledge, the subject of diet and nutrition has become increasingly popular. In fact, there are hundreds of books and magazines almost entirely dedicated to this topic. Though well intentioned, many of these books tend to make people worry too much about their food habits and become neurotic. People start to wonder whether they are consuming the right food and in sufficient quantity to cater for vitamin deficiency. This food neurosis is a far worse problem than a body which is deficient in nutrients of a certain type. So we emphasize – the importance of different foods should not become an obsession in any way, or another problem. If you refer to the heading entitled 'Nutrients and their role in the body' you will find that all the nutrients the body needs are found in a wide range of food types. Therefore, if you are eating a reasonably varied diet, then it is a certainty that you are obtaining all your food requirements.

The purpose of this topic has been to describe the functioning of the digestive system in simple and basic terms in the hope that the reader will become more aware and understanding of the body and have respect for the way it works. Again we repeat try not to become a food faddist or neurotic. If you do, then the whole purpose of this discussion has been defeated.

Because of the importance of digestion in maintaining good health we will include further discussions on this topic later in the book¹.

Notes

¹ Vegetarianism – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 1

Disorders of Digestion – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 1

Asanas: Meditative Asanas

The important feature of any meditative asana is that it should allow the practitioner to sit undisturbed in one position for extended periods of time without discomfort. Meditation practices aim to direct awareness inside the mind and this is totally impossible if the awareness is engrossed and entangled with external events, including the physical body. Introspection is impossible if one continually fidgets, scratches or experiences physical pain. Therefore the aim is to sit in a sufficiently comfortable position that allows the physical body to be forgotten.

Most asanas are not suitable for meditation practices because they require some muscular effort or sense of balance in order to maintain them. For example, *bhujangasana*, *sarpasana* and *meru wakrasana* are excellent asanas for inducing physical and mental health and harmony, but because they require some physical effort they are not suitable asanas for meditation practice¹.

One might assume that relaxation asanas, such as *shavasana* would therefore be the most ideal for they require absolutely no effort². In fact, they can be used for meditation practices but we don't recommend them because it is so easy to relax to such a degree that one falls asleep. And sleep is as far away from meditation as tension. What is required is a high state of relaxation combined with intensified wakefulness. The sages in the past found, from experience, that there are specific asanas most suitable in this respect. There are six of these, known as the classical meditation asanas:

1. *Padmasana* (lotus pose)
2. *Siddhasana* (accomplished pose for men)
3. *Siddha yoni asana* (accomplished pose for women)
4. *Swastikasana* (auspicious pose)
5. *Ardha padmasana* (half lotus pose)
6. *Vajrasana* (the thunderbolt pose)³

The first three asanas 1, 2 and 3 are traditionally accepted as the best meditative asanas.

One should aim to sit in any one of these positions if possible. The second three asanas 4, 5 and 6 are also excellent meditative asanas, which are far easier to perform while being nearly as good as the first three.

Many people will find all six of these classical asanas too difficult and uncomfortable. Under these circumstances either of the following two simpler meditative asanas are suitable:

7. *Veerasana* (hero's pose)
8. *Sukhasana* (easy pose)³

We would like to point out that we don't expect you to practise all these meditative asanas. We are describing them here in order to keep them together as a specific group, as it is useful for reference purposes. Devote your attention to mastering one or two of them at the present time. You can try others in the group later when you have spare time.

The basic features of meditation asanas

In the ancient text, the *Yoga Sutras*, Rishi Patanjali has tersely summed up the essence of meditative asanas in the following manner: "The posture should be steady and comfortable. The posture is mastered by relaxing effort (not trying too hard) and by thinking about the Ananta (this is a mythological serpent symbolizing equilibrium – in particular the stability and the correct orbit of the earth around the sun)."

The first sentence requires no explanation. If we try too hard without relaxing during asanas, we create more tension instead of the desired aim of relaxation. Of course the word *ananta* does not mean much to most people, but the idea behind it is that by thinking about its symbology – stability and equilibrium – the practitioner will feel these attributes in the position of his body. The word *ananta* also has a connection with the notion of endlessness. By invoking a feeling of endlessness, the individual will feel insignificant compared to the infinity around him. In this way, there

will be less tendency to worry about trifling problems that prevent us from relaxing and sitting comfortably for a period of time.

The spine and head are held upright in all the meditative asanas. There are two main reasons for this. The first is to allow free breathing without the slightest hindrance. In other words, all the parts of the body concerned with breathing, namely the chest, diaphragm and abdomen, can move without interference. Secondly, a straight but relaxed spine is less likely to result in backache. This is a common problem with many people when they have to sit in one position for a reasonably long period of time. This subject will be discussed more fully under a subsequent heading.

Another common characteristic of the meditative asanas is that they all have a very firm and stable base. This is absolutely necessary in order that the body remains steady throughout the meditation or pranayama practice. In all the meditative asanas, except vajrasana, the legs are folded so that they form a triangular base. This prevents the body from toppling either backwards or forwards. Furthermore, in this position the arms and hands can be placed in a comfortable position on the knees or in the lap. In this position they are not likely to cause any disturbance.

As we have already mentioned, the meditative asanas are designed so that the least amount of effort is required to maintain them. This is very important in order to attain maximum relaxation and to be able to forget the body during meditation practices.

Incorrect position of the back

The most common mistake made by beginners when they sit in a meditative asana is to hold the back too straight. That is, they sit with their back arched, the navel pushed forwards and the head tilted back. This may look very impressive, especially to people who do not practise yoga, but it is not very comfortable. Further, not many people will be able to maintain this position for more than a few minutes without slumping forwards. This is merely replacing one extreme with another.

Actually, when we say keep the spine straight, we are asking the impossible, for the normal shape or contour of the spine is certainly not straight, it is S-shaped. No matter how much

you try, you will not be able to make your spine perfectly straight – the bone structure prevents this. When we instruct you to keep your spine straight, we mean that the back should be held upright without slumping forwards or being arched backwards. In other words, allow the spine to take the position in which it is most comfortable. You will find from personal experience which is the best position of your back.

We again emphasize that you should try to avoid either slumping forwards or straining backwards. Both of these positions prevent optimum relaxation and free breathing. It is impossible to relax if you are struggling to hold the spine in an abnormally arched position, just as it is impossible to relax with an aching back from a forward slumped position. And we assure you that backache is most likely to occur if you are slumped forwards. It is essential for optimum results to hold your head and back in a comfortable upright position.

Mastery of meditation asanas

There are very few people who can sit in the classical meditation asanas without previously loosening up their legs over a period of time. Those who can are usually children. For this reason it is essential that the reader regularly practises special exercises to loosen up the leg muscles and joints⁴.

At first you may feel that your legs are too stiff to sit in any of these advanced sitting positions. This happens to everyone. Yet, with perseverance, even those people with the stiffest legs can master meditative asanas. The author speaks from experience, for when he first started practising yoga, he could not even sit in sukhasana, the cross-legged pose. But with persistent practice the legs became looser and more flexible, until he was able to sit in any of the meditative asanas with more comfort than sitting in an armchair.

The mental attitude is very important. If you start pessimistically with the belief that you will never master meditative asanas, then you have immediately defeated yourself. Be optimistic. Assume that it is only a matter of time and practice before you can sit comfortably in any of the asanas. If you believe this enough then the mind, which controls the body, will automatically begin to make physical changes. In other words, your mind will fix a

role and your body will prepare and change itself accordingly. You will find that your legs become progressively flexible over a period of weeks and months. Both regular physical loosening up exercises and mental determination are necessary.

It will be with a wonderful feeling of accomplishment and satisfaction that you will eventually sit in one of the more difficult classical meditative asanas for the first time. You may only hold the final pose for a second or so when discomfort will oblige you to quickly unfold your legs again. Yet at this stage, you have more than passed the halfway mark towards full proficiency in the asana (called *asana siddhi* in Sanskrit). The aim must now be to extend the period of time in which you can maintain the final pose. This must be done slowly over a period of weeks and months. No excessive force should be used; all that is necessary is to increase the duration by a few seconds every day.

Eventually you should be able to sit in a meditative asana for half an hour and more, without the slightest urge to move the body. This implies that the asana is comfortable and without the slightest physical pain. It is under these circumstances that you will start to gain the most from your meditation and pranayama practices. Your awareness will more easily become one-pointed for it will not be disturbed by discomfort of the body.

Premeditative loosening up

We have already emphasized that it is essential for the body to be as comfortable and relaxed as possible during meditative and pranayama practices. Even those people who can sit in all the meditative asanas without the slightest difficulty will occasionally experience stiffness. This is especially likely in the early morning when the body is stiffer than at any other time of the day.

For this reason a program of asanas is recommended before practising meditation and pranayama. These will not only loosen up the whole body in preparation for the sitting pose, but will also calm the mind. We particularly recommend the practice of the six leg loosening exercises⁴. It is not necessary to do them all – one or two is sufficient. In particular, we recommend the half butterfly and hip rotation which can be done within a

few minutes. Do more of the exercises if you have the time. They will help you to gain the most from your practices, for you will be less troubled by aches and pains in your legs. We recommend that these exercises be done by both beginners and experts alike, just before commencing meditation and pranayama. These exercises are especially useful when you have no time to perform asanas, perhaps in the evening.

Which meditative asana to practise?

There are eight meditative asanas. We do not expect you to practise all of them regularly, for there is no need. Choose any one of them in which you feel the most comfortable and use it for the duration of your practice. However the three asanas, padmasana, siddhasana and siddha yoni asana, are considered the best asanas and you should aim at eventually mastering one of these three. Some people believe that padmasana is superior to siddhasana and others say the opposite. Actually neither one is superior, they are equally as good as each other. However, some practices of yoga, including kriya yoga, prescribe either padmasana or siddhasana for specific purposes. Remember, siddha yoni asana is the female equivalent of siddhasana.

These three asanas are not the best or most suitable because they look spectacular or because they are difficult. There are very good reasons why they are the preferred sitting positions for meditation practice. Firstly, these asanas provide the most stable and rigid sitting positions of all meditative asanas. The body feels as firm and as immovable as a rock. Secondly, these asanas will automatically encourage the practitioner to hold the back and spine upright with little or no effort. There is much less tendency to slump forwards compared to other sitting positions. Thirdly, the contact area between the body and the ground is large. This distributes the weight of the body over a wide area, thereby preventing the occurrence of pain in the buttocks. This is one of the main faults of sukhasana⁵. The weight of the body is supported on a small area of the buttocks, which quickly results in discomfort. If you are a beginner to yoga, we don't expect you to be able to sit in these three preferred asanas immediately, for they require flexibility of the legs. This suppleness

can only be attained with regular practice over a period of time. In this case meditation and pranayama practices can be performed using a simpler sitting position. For this purpose swastikasana, ardha padmasana and vajrasana are excellent asanas. Furthermore, they progressively loosen up the legs so that one can eventually sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. The three simpler asanas are all splendid sitting positions for they keep the back straight, provide a good area of contact with the floor, and are reasonably steady. The reader must choose for himself through personal experience which is best for him.

If you cannot sit in any of the asanas we have just mentioned, then use either sukhasana or veerasana. These are both reasonably good sitting positions, but not as beneficial as the other sitting poses for the back easily slumps forwards and one feels discomfort.

If you are exceptionally stiff, then you may find that all of these asanas are unsuitable. Under these circumstances sit with your legs outstretched in front of the body, if necessary leaning your back against a wall for support.

Sitting in a comfortable chair is often recommended for meditation and pranayama practices. However, we don't advise this for it quickly leads to discomfort; the body will slump forwards, one will move and be continually aware of the body. This will occur in even the plushiest armchairs, unless of course you relax so much that you fall asleep. So we emphasize that you should not practise while sitting in a chair of any kind. If, however, there is some physical reason why you cannot take any position but one in a comfortable chair then you should by all means do so. Shavasana could also be used for meditation if necessary but as we have previously mentioned it is not recommended because it is so conducive to sleep.

There must be a balance between too much discomfort so that one cannot forget the body and too much comfort so that one falls asleep. The eight meditative asanas we have listed have been found throughout thousands of years of practice to most perfectly fit this role.

Backache and pain in the legs

Whichever sitting asana you use in the beginning, you are sure to feel aches and pains in the back and legs. Over a period of time this

tendency can be removed by daily practice of asanas that exercise and flex the whole body, strengthening the muscles, loosening the joints and releasing tension in the nerves. These other asanas not only prepare the body for the sitting positions, but help to bring about health of mind and body.

After sitting in one position for some time, these aches and pains can be removed in a variety of ways. The best way to remove leg pains is to slowly straighten your legs and then bend them a few times at the knees. This quickly releases tension. The best way to remove backache is to bend the back forwards, backwards and then to the right and the left. Three excellent asanas are shashankasana, bhujangasana and meru wakrasana¹. Although there are many more asanas that can be used the reader can experiment and find out for himself the most suitable ones.

There is conflicting opinion as to whether one should bear aches and pains without moving during meditation and pranayama or to remove the aches and pains by adjusting the position of the body and then continuing the practice. Actually discretion must be used in this respect. Ideally one should not move while performing meditation or pranayama practices, but this is very difficult if you suffer great pain. Furthermore, it is impossible to be fully aware of the practice in hand if one's attention is diverted due to physical pain. Therefore we recommend that a reasonable degree of discomfort be tolerated, for if you absorb yourself in the practice it is possible to forget your aches and pains. However, if the aches and pains are overwhelming and you see no chance of being able to forget the body, then adjust your position, loosen up your limbs and then reassume your sitting position to continue your practice.

Eventually this problem will not arise, for your body will become sufficiently flexible and relaxed to prevent discomfort and your awareness will become increasingly fixed on performing the practice. Under these circumstances you will not be aware of pain, even if the body is uncomfortable, and there will be no tendency to move or fidget.

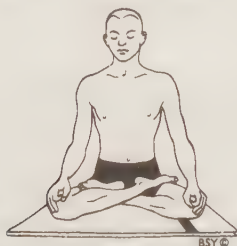
Caution

Under no circumstances should you use excessive force to try to sit in any of these asanas. Be

patient and wait for the leg muscles to stretch and become more flexible over a period of time. Strain will only cause more harm than good.

PADMASANA (LOTUS POSE)

This is one of the best meditative asanas. The sitting position itself is conducive to physical and mental calmness. At first it is quite difficult for most people to perform, and uncomfortable if held for more than a few minutes. However, with practice this asana will prove far more comfortable than the simpler sitting positions, such as veerasana and sukhasana. It holds the trunk of the body and the head as though they are a pillar, with the legs as its firm foundation. This asana almost automatically makes one want to be still. It is with good reason that Buddha is usually depicted in this pose.



Technique

Place a blanket on the floor.

Sit with the legs stretched forwards.

Slowly fold one leg and place the foot on the thigh of the opposite leg.

The sole of the foot must face upwards, with the heel in contact with the front of the lower abdomen.

When you feel comfortable, fold the other leg in the same way, also placing the foot on top of the opposite thigh.

In the final pose, both knees should rest comfortably on the floor.

Hold the back and head upright, but without strain. Close your eyes.

Position of the hands and arms

Relax the arms with the elbows bent. The hands can be placed either on the knees or clasped in the lap. Choose the position that you find most comfortable. If you place your hands on the knees you can practise a number

of mudras. There are two important ones – namely jnana mudra and chin mudra⁵.

General advice

Some people find that this asana is most comfortable if the left leg is folded first; others, if the right leg is folded first. Experiment and find out for yourself which is most suitable.

Allow the shoulders to relax without raising or hunching them.

You may find this asana easier if you place a small cushion under the buttocks before assuming the final pose. Before sitting in padmasana we advise all people to loosen up their legs by practising the half butterfly and knee rotation exercises⁴. Do not force your legs into padmasana if they lack the necessary flexibility. Practise ardha padmasana instead.

Limitations

People suffering from sciatica or sacral infections should not attempt this asana.

Benefits

Padmasana induces mental calmness, which is the essential prerequisite for pranayama and meditative practices. This tranquillity also helps to bring about physical health and mental equilibrium on a permanent basis. The steadiness of the body induces steadiness of the mind. The position and pressure of the feet against the thighs reduces the flow of blood to the legs. This blood supply is redirected towards the abdominal and pelvic organs, thereby toning up the organs, muscles and nerves in this region.

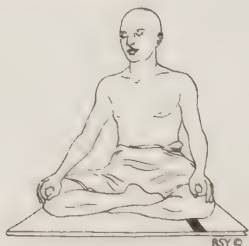
SIDDHASANA

(MALE ACCOMPLISHED POSE)

The Sanskrit word *siddha* has many meanings and implications. It means 'power' and 'perfection', so that this asana can also be called the perfect pose or the powerful pose. The word *siddhi* is derived from *siddha* and means a psychic power or faculty developed through yogic practices. This includes clairvoyance, telepathy as well as many other lesser known powers such as the ability to disappear at will. Siddhasana is believed to be the asana that helps to develop these powers.

It is an excellent meditative asana and the equal of padmasana. It is often used in

specific practices for it applies pressure in the region between the anus and the sexual organs (mooladhara chakra). Siddhasana can only be practised by men. The female equivalent is called siddha yoni asana.



Technique

Sit with the legs stretched in front of the body. Fold your right leg and place the sole of the right foot against the inside of the left thigh. Your right heel should be placed so that it presses against the area between the anus and the genitals (the perineum).

This is an important aspect of Siddhasana.

Adjust your body until you are comfortable and the heel is firmly applied against the perineum.

Then fold your left leg and place the left foot on top of the right calf.

If possible, try to adjust the position of the left heel so that it presses into the pelvis immediately above the genitals.

Your genitals should therefore lie between the two heels.

If you find this last position difficult, do not worry; merely place your left heel as near as possible to the required position.

Adjust the position of the left toes so that they can be pushed into the space between your right calf and thigh.

The left toes should fit into this space without any pain or general discomfort.

If necessary, this space can be enlarged slightly by using the hands or temporarily adjusting the position of the right leg.

Then grasp your right toes, either from below or above your left leg and pull them upwards into the space between your left thigh and calf.

Adjust the body so that it is comfortable.

The knees should be in contact with the ground.

The heels should preferably be one above the other.

Hold the spine and head upright, yet relaxed.

General advice

A cushion can be used to elevate the buttocks slightly and to reduce pressure between the lower ankle and the floor. The practitioner must find out for himself whether it is best to fold the right leg or the left leg first.

Many people experience discomfort because of the pressure applied where the two ankles cross each other. If necessary, place a folded cloth or piece of sponge between the legs at this point to reduce the pain. At first you may find the pressure at the perineum difficult to bear for more than a minute or so. With practise this time will be increased.

This asana requires a reasonable degree of leg flexibility. Therefore do not attempt to force your legs beyond what their flexibility will allow.

Limitations

Siddhasana should not be practised by people with sciatica or sacral ailments.

Benefits

Siddhasana gives essentially the same benefits as padmasana. It differs, however, from padmasana in that one of the heels applies pressure in the region of the perineum. This pressure is necessary in various yogic practices such as moola bandha and vajroli mudra. These are used a great deal in kriya yoga techniques together with siddhasana. This pressure is important, for it is concerned with awakening a psychic centre in this area called the mooladhara chakra. This will be discussed in the future⁶.

SIDDHA YONI ASANA (ACCOMPLISHED POSE FOR WOMEN)

The Sanskrit word *yoni* means 'womb' or 'source'. In this context it means that this asana is the female equivalent of siddhasana. It is to be practised by women instead of siddhasana.

Technique

Sit on the floor with your legs extended straight in front of you.

Fold your right leg and place the sole of the right foot so that it is in contact with the inside of the left thigh.

Adjust your right heel so that it presses firmly against the front of your vagina (labia majora).



Adjust your body position so that you are comfortable, while simultaneously feeling the pressure of the right heel.

Then fold your left leg and place the left foot on top of the right calf.

Gently slide the left toes into the space between the right calf and thigh.

Pull your right toes upwards into the space between your left calf and thigh.

Adjust your body so that you feel comfortable. Ensure that your knees are firmly on the ground.

Make sure that your spine and head are held erect.

Close your eyes and imagine that your body is firmly fixed in the ground as though it is a tree.

Further details

One should refer to the sections in siddhasana for more information on the position of the hands and arms, general advice and limitations.

Benefits

Siddha yoni asana is an excellent pose and the equal of padmasana. It is used with many other practices which aim at awakening mooladhara chakra.

This asana is necessary for women because the position of the mooladhara chakra is slightly different to that of men.

It has a direct influence on the nerve plexuses of the female reproductive system. It helps one to gain control over the neuropsychic impulses which are concerned with the mooladhara chakra and the associated physical sexual organs.

SWASTIKASANA (AUSPICIOUS POSE)

The Sanskrit word *swastika* means 'auspicious' or 'favourable'. It is symbolized by the swastika, which is known by various religions and cults

throughout the world. Some people regard it as the most universal of symbols. It is only in this century that it has developed negative associations. The symbol has many meanings but a common one is that its spokes represent the different corners of the world and the universe, and that everything has a meeting point and common centre – consciousness. This asana can be regarded as the one most favourable for realizing the unity of existence.

Swastikasana looks very similar to siddhasana but it is far easier to perform because neither of the heels apply pressure at the base of the trunk.

Technique

For illustration see siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Fold the left leg and place the left foot near or in contact with the right thigh muscles.

Bend the right leg and push the right toes into the space between the left thigh and calf muscles.

Then pull the toes of the left leg upwards into the space between the right calf and thigh muscles.

Adjust the body until you feel comfortable.

The hands can be placed on the knees in jnana mudra, chin mudra or chinmaya mudra⁵; or the hands can be clasped and held in the lap. Relax the arms and allow the shoulders to drop.

Close your eyes and relax the whole body.

Further details

Details on limitations and general advice are as given for padmasana.

Benefits

Swastikasana looks very much like siddhasana and siddha yoni asana and gives basically the same benefits. However, it is not such a good asana because it does not press the area of the mooladhara chakra. As this is important, swastikasana is not generally used in kriya yoga. However, it is an excellent asana for general meditation practices and pranayama, and should be used by those people who cannot sit comfortably in the better but more difficult meditative asanas.

ARDHA PADMASANA (HALF LOTUS POSE)

This is an excellent asana to prepare the legs for padmasana. It is also a good meditative asana in its own right.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the legs extended in front of the body.

Fold the left leg and place the left foot on the floor beside the right thigh.

Then fold the right foot on top of the left thigh. Without straining, try to place the heel of the right leg as near as possible to the abdomen. Adjust your body to a comfortable position. Hold the back, neck and head upright.

Place the hands on the knees or clasp them and place them in the lap.

Close your eyes and relax the body.

Preparation for padmasana

If you can do ardha padmasana then you are well on the way to mastering padmasana. Use this asana to prepare the legs for padmasana. In this respect alternately fold one leg on top of the other, if necessary, while doing pranayama or meditation practices. That is, first fold the legs so that the right leg is on top. When this position becomes uncomfortable or the next time you sit for practice, place the left leg on top. In this way you will loosen up both legs. If one of your legs is more flexible than the other, then you should spend more time sitting in ardha padmasana with the least flexible leg on top. This will increase the flexibility of the leg.

VEERASANA (HERO'S POSE)

This is a simple asana which is rarely used for meditative practices. Yet we feel that for many people it will be more comfortable than sukhasana, since there is a larger area of contact with the ground.



Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor.

Sit with the legs outstretched in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the left foot so that it is under and to the side of the right buttock. Now bend the right leg over the top of the left leg, placing the right foot beside the left buttock.

Arrange the position of the knees so that one is above the other.

Hold the head, neck and back upright.

Place the hands either on the feet; on the knees, one on top of the other, palms facing downwards; or on your lap, one on top of the other, palms facing upwards.

Choose the most comfortable position in which your arms are totally relaxed.

Relax the whole body. This is the final pose.

Note: there are other forms of veerasana, but this one is the most useful for sitting purposes. There are no limitations.

Benefits

This is a comfortable sitting position for those people who cannot sit in the more difficult meditative asanas. Like all meditative asanas, it is conducive to physical and mental equilibrium.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

² Shavasana: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5; Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

³ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

⁴ Ardha titali asana, kauva chalasana and shroni chakra – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3; poorna titali asana, kashtha takshanasana and vayu nishkasana: Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

⁵ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

⁶ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

In the next lesson we intend to describe nadi shodhana pranayama stage 3¹. This involves retention of breath at the end of each inhalation. As a preparation for this stage we want you to incorporate breath retention for small durations into your daily practice of nadi shodhana stage 2.

PREPARATION FOR NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 3

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana.

Do stage 1 of nadi shodhana².

A few minutes practice through each nostril is sufficient.

Then do stage 2 of nadi shodhana³.

Remember the aim is to eventually make inhalation and exhalation fixed at the ratio 1:2.

This can slowly be accomplished over a period of time.

The duration of each exhalation and each inhalation should be also progressively increased, keeping the ratio fixed.

Don't strain.

Continue this practice according to the time available.

When you find absolutely no difficulty in practising stage 2 and you stabilize your breathing so that the durations of exhalation and inhalation occur spontaneously without effort, then begin to retain your breath after inhalation.

At first, only hold your breath for a second or so, counting mentally as you do.

The duration of this retention can slowly be increased in each practice session and over the weeks of regular practice.

At this stage retain your breath for no longer than 5 seconds.

For clarity we will briefly describe 1 round:

Breathe in through your left nostril, keeping the right nostril closed.

Retain your breath for a short time with both nostrils closed.

Breathe out through your right nostril with the left nostril closed.

Breathe in through your right nostril.

Retain your breath.

Breathe out through your left nostril.

This is 1 round.

Remember that the ratio of inhalation to exhalation should be 1:2. That is, for every count of inhalation, 2 counts must be allowed for exhalation.

Further details

This subject will be fully discussed when we describe nadi shodhana stage 3¹. The practice we have given here is merely intended as preparation.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

³ Nadi shodhana (stage 2) – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3 and Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

Meditation: An Introduction

The aim of meditation practices is to induce the spontaneous state of meditation. It is impossible to teach meditation, no matter what many people say. If a person tells you that he will teach you meditation then he is not being strictly truthful. Though it is probably no more than a play of words, the only thing that anyone can teach is a method that will lead you to the experience of meditation. Remember this important point: meditation is unteachable by the very fact that it is beyond words.

Because meditation is impossible to define in concrete terms, its meaning is widely abused and misunderstood. Many people sit down, close their eyes for some time and consider that they have meditated. Well, maybe they have – who are we to say otherwise? But generally it is the case that one broods over problems and thinks of external happenings while in this so-called state of meditation. This is definitely not meditation. Though the eyes may be closed, there is no introspection if the mind is thinking about the outside world, about a cup of tea, breakfast, work or many other distractions. This is merely living in the outside world with one's eyes closed. It is little different to actually taking part in the outer phenomena with the eyes open. Meditation is beyond this inner or outer interaction with the world.

The state of experience of meditation is not only confined to those people who sit in a quiet place with their eyes closed and perform various practices to induce meditation. This is merely one method of meditating and is called raja yoga. It is also possible to be in a state of meditation while performing everyday duties. This is more in line with the practices of karma yoga and bhakti yoga. A person can perform the most trivial actions and yet simultaneously be in the highest stages of exaltation. He can cut the lawn, drive a car, make policy decisions, wash the dishes and at the same time exist in a state of meditation. And probably no one else, unless they were also in a similar state, would

realize. Your actions would in no way indicate that you are meditating. This is what the Zen masters attempt to convey when they say:

*How wondrous this, how mysterious;
I carry fuel, I draw water.*

—Ho loji

*Pursuing the tasks of everyday life
I walk along the ancient path.
I am not disheartened in the mindless void.*

—Chikan

So remember, there are different paths to meditation. Some involve actions in the outside world (as is the case with karma yoga) while others involve introspection and temporarily leaving aside outside activities (as with raja yoga). In this discussion, though we will speak about meditation in general, our attention will be mainly on meditation in relation to raja yoga.

The evolution of man

During the last few thousand years man has made great steps in his evolution. The early nomadic forms of man were primarily concerned with survival, with obtaining the basic necessities of life and protecting himself against environmental hazards. Since then man has been more and more able to control nature in accordance with his own needs and whims. In other words, nature has increasingly become the servant of man instead of the enemy. Particularly in modern times man has been able to devote more time to affairs outside mere survival. People are able to think about such questions as existence and happiness. Furthermore, whereas primitive man's evolution was determined by the external environment, modern man is able to decide the direction of his own evolution. The direction of man's evolution so far has in general been physical and mental. That is, the

human body became an increasingly efficient instrument and the mind more capable of heightened intellectual sophistication and deeper thoughts. This process is still continuing. Yet at the same time, this path of evolution appears to have come to a dead-end. Or rather we should say that this evolution process seems now to be suspended above an abyss. The path continues on the other side of the chasm, yet to continue on this path one must build a bridge. This bridge is meditation. Each of us have reached a certain point in our evolution, yet at the same time our present condition and values seem to be lopsided. Something is missing from our lives. This missing link is inner, spiritual evolution. This is the whole point of meditation.

Evolution is a continuous progression from the unrefined to the refined, from the disorderly to the orderly and from the gross to the subtle. The present time is a crossroads in the path of evolution. We can either continue our present physical and rational development and fall into the abyss, or we can develop and unfold our more subtle inner faculties to land safely on the other side. In other words, we can continue to concern ourselves only with the external world to the exclusion of our inner being, or else we can realize our inner potential while still expressing ourselves in the outer environment. This is the choice. The first choice leads to chaos and unhappiness as is prevalent in the world today. The alternative leads to knowledge, happiness and a harmonious interaction not only with yourself but with others. Furthermore, the first choice has limitations in its scope, whereas the second offers infinite possibilities, for it leads into new and higher planes of existence, new planes of consciousness, and to indescribable states of happiness. The second choice is the spiritual path. It does not lead to abandonment of the external world. On the contrary, it leads to even more growth, enjoyment and accomplishment in day to day activities.

This alternative path of evolution has been known and explored by large numbers of people throughout history. It is not something new or recently discovered. It is not a path that has been taught and practised by a few deluded people with their 'heads in the clouds'. On the contrary they were very practical people. They were the saints, prophets, mystics, sages and

yogis who have existed in all places, eras and in all societies. They all knew that the path each of us must tread lies in awakening our inner potential.

Let us consider a few of their sayings: Christ said, "The kingdom of God is within you." And this same idea was declared by another great sage, for Buddha said: "Look within, thou art the Buddha (pure in consciousness)." This was echoed by the Greeks, for they wrote above the main door of their temples the following sentence: "Man, know thyself, and thou shalt know the universe". In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna affirmed this when he said: "Meditation is far better than knowledge (intellectual knowledge)." In recent times this was beautifully phrased by Ramakrishna Paramahansa as follows: "The fabled musk deer searches the whole world over for the source of the scent which comes from within."

How is it possible that these different people, living at different times in different parts of the world and with different languages and social backgrounds could utter exactly the same idea, though clothed in dissimilar terms? The answer is obvious: they were speaking about a basic truth of existence. These people knew that the path of evolution of higher awareness lies in unfolding the inner realms of our being. It does not lie in totally absorbing or losing ourselves in hectic external actions. It is possible for everyone to learn from their experiences and from the knowledge that they tried to pass on to other people.

Infinite dormant potential exists within each of us. It is there waiting only to be discovered. To find it, however, we must plunge into our inner being. In a sense we must be like an explorer; but instead of exploring outer unknown territories we have to discover the inner uncharted environment. Like the first explorers of the world, we don't really know where it will lead us. We must be like Marco Polo, for example, unknowing of the nature of our journey and destination. Marco Polo had strange but wonderful experiences on his journey and fabulous riches at his destination – China. It is the same with meditation. We cannot tell you the wonderful experiences that you will have on your inner journey; only that you will surely have them. Many people did not believe the stories and experiences that Marco Polo described when he returned home. It is

the same with meditation; no one will believe people who relate their experiences unless, of course, they have made a similar journey themselves.

The choice is yours: either you continue to devote all your attention to fumbling around in the outside world as most people now do, or else you try to evolve in a new direction – inwards, following the advice of those who have already made the same choice and quest. The choice is easy because you do not have to give up your present lifestyle. All you need is the interest to make the inner journey of self-discovery and to back it up with yogic practices, including meditation.

We all deceive ourselves. We assume that what we see around us is all that there is. Further, we think that our personality is the totality of our being. People wander all over the world trying to find themselves, not realizing that the greatest marvel lies within. This was clearly pointed out by St. Augustine when he lamented: “Men travel to gaze upon mountain heights and the waves of the sea, broad flowing rivers and the expanse of the ocean, and yet pass by themselves, the crowning wonder.”

Consider a calm, still lake in which is reflected a big full moon. The image of the moon looks real and if the real moon was not in the sky to remind us otherwise, many would mistake the reflection for the moon itself. The reflection cannot exist by itself, yet the moon can exist without reflection. It is the same with our personality – we see only the reflected personality and mistake it for our real nature without realizing that the personality manifesting at present is dependent on something deeper. To find our real Self is higher meditation.

Even modern scientists acknowledge that there is far more to each person than is commonly believed. Many eminent scientists have echoed the words of the ancient sages. They have said that the majority of our potential remains untapped. Some quote ninety-five percent of our latent capacity lies dormant, others ninety percent. Actually these are only random figures to illustrate that we are definitely not using much of our potential. Some of these scientists are now sounding like mystics. They say that the greatest discoveries and explorations of the future will be in the

mind and not in the outer world. Instead of exploring space, we will start to make deeper and deeper journeys into inner space. This is the direction of the evolution of man.

The depths of the mind

Yoga and modern psychology are fully aware of the deeper layers of the mind. Many of us have heard of the subconscious, and unconscious realms. Nevertheless, many people still hold the naive idea that the mind thinks only of conscious images at any given time. We fail to realize that the mind is like a vast computer which is continually receiving, sorting out, analyzing and rejecting millions of bits of data. In a computer we generally only see the printout or final result. The information within the mind which we don't normally see is arbitrarily termed the unconscious and subconscious. The mind is often compared to an iceberg, the conscious mind being the one-tenth that lies above the water, and the unconscious and subconscious parts being the far larger nine-tenths that are submerged below the surface of the water. Even this is a gross understatement, for there is far more below the surface than we can even dream.

The mind, in its unconscious and subconscious realms, contains different facets of being. It contains our basic urges and instincts. It contains the intellectual and rational aspects of our being. It contains primitive memories with which we have had totally no connection in our life. It contains ideas, visions, dreams that are far more awe-inspiring than even the most vivid fiction novel. The mind contains the most incredible and almost impossible aspects that are completely inconceivable to most of us. The aim of yoga and meditation is to bring these normally unknown layers of the mind to conscious perception. The term expansion of consciousness is also used but often conveys the wrong idea because consciousness is the substratum or the essence behind existence; as such it is impossible to expand consciousness.

It is only by knowing the depths of the mind that we can really know ourselves as well as the world around us. As an analogy, consider the outer world as an infinite horizontal circle. This circle represents the realm of time-space and the centre represents eternity or timelessness. Most of us confine our attention only to the outside world, remaining on the circum-

ference of the circle. We find it impossible to enter the circle and reach the centre. The only way to enter the circle and break away from our fetters is to explore the mind. In this way we begin to simultaneously realize truths in the external world. The more we become aware of the depths of the mind, the nearer we approach the centre of the circle. When we reach the centre it is called self-realization.

Each type of journey that we make requires a vehicle. If we walk in the park then our legs assume this role. If we travel to the local town then we go by bus, train or car. If we go to a country across the sea, we travel by ship or aeroplane. The journey into inner space also requires a vehicle – the vehicle is meditation.

The fundamental mechanics of meditation practice

The techniques of meditation practices are reasonably easy to learn. Yet they will never bring results unless they are practised regularly and with dedication. Sad to say, many people believe that to experience meditation it is necessary to fill the mind with numerous different techniques, none of which they practise seriously. As a result they gain nothing. This is an easy pitfall, for we are all habituated to believing that results come through learning. That is, we believe that the more facts we accumulate the wiser we will become. In intellectual terms this may be partly true but it is certainly not true with meditation practices, and for that matter with yoga in general. A person can know almost nothing intellectually and yet by knowing one meditation technique and practising it with dedication, can experience the joy and knowledge of meditation. Success does not depend on factual knowledge. Throughout history there are numerous examples of both uneducated and highly educated people who have achieved the highest states of meditation. We all have access to the mind potential, whether rich or poor, intellectual or non-intellectual, young or old, male or female. The main requirements for delving into the mind and realizing its potential are aspiration and practice. This is the way to experience the bliss and transcendental knowledge of meditation.

As we have already mentioned, there are two principal methods of inducing meditation: passive and active. Active methods are practis-

ed during everyday life, when one walks, talks, eats and performs daily functions. This is the realm of karma yoga and bhakti yoga. The aim is to be in a state of meditation while actively involved in worldly events. This does not imply that actions are performed indifferently, or that the aspirant walks around in a sleeping state. Far from it. The person will perform his activities with greater enthusiasm, efficiency and energy.

Passive methods to induce meditation are the ones that we normally term meditation practices. This is the method of raja yoga. A fixed period of time is set aside daily solely for the purpose of introspection. These methods can also lead to meditation outside the actual time of practising the passive techniques. In other words, the state of meditation carries over into everyday life. It is this form of passive practice that we will discuss here.

Actually, even the word passive is a misnomer for it is only the body that is passive and motionless. The internal environment can be a hive of activity on a conscious level, either spontaneous or intentional, whether it is desired or not. In some people this process is automatic. Many people watch a person practising passive meditation techniques and assume that the person is either asleep or unconscious. This may be the case, but if the practices are done properly this could not be further from the truth.

The first step is to overcome disturbances of the body. It is difficult for most people to sit comfortably in one position for more than a minute or so without feeling pain or wanting to scratch. This causes the awareness to be wholly externalized – exactly the opposite to what is required, for the aim is to direct the awareness inwards to the workings of the mind.

The next step is to try to achieve calmness of mind and relaxation. Most people have a mind that is like a stormy sea. Before we can see below the surface we must first of all settle down the tumultuous waves. This is done through awareness. In other words, we try to be aware of one object, symbol or process of thought. This takes practice, but eventually it is possible to focus the awareness on one thing to the exclusion of all others. This one-pointed attention allows the awareness to pierce and enter the various depths of the mind. A dull arrow will not penetrate the target, whereas

a sharp one well-aimed will decisively pierce the bull's eye. This point of awareness acts as a vehicle for the journey into the mind. It is merely a means to an end. Furthermore, this point of awareness prevents the meditator falling into a state of unconsciousness. That is, it is very easy to lapse into a state of sleep if one relaxes mentally and physically and tries to do meditation practices. This point acts as a continual reminder of our awareness. The vehicle in karma yoga is intense, concentrated work; in bhakti yoga overwhelming devotion to a person or one object, and in jnana yoga the vehicle is an all absorbing enquiry.

Many people try to concentrate too hard in order to meditate. However, concentration does not come easily or spontaneously to a disturbed mind. Therefore, to try to attain concentration they strain themselves; instead of becoming relaxed and calm, they actually create more tension. Under these circumstances it is impossible to meditate. For this reason we don't advise people to concentrate intently. Instead, we ask them to be aware of an object or process of thought to the best of their ability. That is, if the mind tends to wander, then don't fight it – let it wander, but remain aware of the object or thought process. In this way you will not only attain one-pointedness but will simultaneously enjoy a state of mental and physical relaxation.

There are many things that can be used as an object of one-pointedness. It does not matter as long as the object is able to hold one's attention easily. The following are a few of the most common objects: the breathing process, mantras such as Aum, an external or internal picture of a great sage or guru, the tip of the nose, different parts of the body or any other symbol that appeals to you. One particularly good practice uses awareness of the thought process itself. Remember, all these are the means that lead to meditation, not meditation itself.

We have only briefly mentioned the fundamental mechanics of passive meditation practices. Because we have spoken very generally, without detail, virtually all specific practices conform to this basic mode or pattern. Our mind, at its different layers, is in a continual state of chatter. Normally this inner disturbance together with our over-extroverted way of life prevents us from seeing

into the mind. Meditation practices are a way of drawing aside the curtains of the mind and peering inside. We cannot talk about meditation, we can only discuss the practices that lead to meditation. Most people are in a fluctuating state of emotional turmoil. This is a serious impediment to meditation. It is so difficult to relax sufficiently and become one-pointed even when we are alone. We are continually beset by worries, dislikes, jealousy and many other emotional disturbances and these cannot be overcome in one night. Time is necessary. Meditation techniques will help to bring about this end, but we sincerely advise the practitioner to refer to our previous discussion on relaxation¹.

Meditation practices are excellent methods of confronting the problems, conflicts and other disturbances hidden in the normally inaccessible recesses of the mind. Once we face these negative aspects of our mind they will automatically drop away. Each person can become his own psychiatrist-cum-psychologist. As these problems are gradually removed, so one's life becomes an expression of joy and happiness. Our lives will be transformed.

It is very easy to give the wrong impression about meditation and meditation practices. It is possible for everyone to know the joy of meditation, yet at the same time effort is required. It would be most surprising if a person starts to meditate on the first attempt. In fact we have never known this to happen. Regular and sincere practice and time are required. The time depends on the individual, on his problems, on his dedication and other factors. But all effort is worthwhile, more so than anything else you are likely to do in your life. So don't expect instant meditation but persevere in your practices.

We all tend to be sceptical of things of which we have no experience. This is our constitution. With meditation it is far easier to be sceptical and disbelieving than with many other concepts, for it is intangible. Even the author was deeply sceptical when he was first introduced to the possibilities of meditation. He found it difficult to comprehend how 'merely closing one's eyes' could lead to anything more than sleep. This of course is a natural tendency. It is only through personal experience that this naivety and the accompanying doubts are slowly but surely erased. Furthermore, we

emphasize that you can read volumes of books on meditation and still disbelief will exist. It is only the personal experience of meditation, even if it is the faintest glimmer, that can make us realize the power, knowledge and joy that are our heritage.

Notes

- ¹ The Art and Science of Relaxation – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
- The Root Cause of Tension – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 7
- Relaxation – Shavasana (Part 2) – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Meditation: Rules for Practice

To experience meditation it is essential to follow a few basic rules and preparations. The following general suggestions are intended for those people who have never known meditation but have the aspiration to find out what it is for themselves. Lack of preparation can prevent one making progress, especially in the early stages. It is therefore important that the following rules are carried out to the best of your ability and whenever possible.

Time: It is best to have fixed times for your daily meditation practices. This regularity establishes a familiar routine ensuring that the mind and body are prepared for the practice.

The best period of the day is early in the morning, or in the evening before retiring for bed. In fact, the most auspicious hours are between four and six o'clock in the morning. In India this time of the morning is called *brahmamuhurta* and is known to be especially conducive to meditation. At this time the body and mind are likely to be most relaxed. Furthermore, this is the quietest time of the day with least likelihood of being disturbed by outer diversions. It is the time when you are not normally overwhelmed by your daily problems.

It is important to practise either before eating or a few hours after. It is difficult to relax with a full stomach. If you must practise after meals, it is best to eat moderately.

Duration: Some people in their enthusiasm begin by devoting a very long time to their practices. However, gradually this enthusiasm tends to wane. For example, one person might decide to practise for an hour every day. The second day this will be shortened for any excuse that is available. On the third day the practice will be further reduced and on the fourth day he might leave it completely. It is far better to begin with a duration that you can easily maintain every day. Even ten minutes practice every day is better than one hour one day, half an hour the next day and no time on

the third day. Be realistic and choose a period of time that you can set aside for your practice. As you progress, slowly increase the time as required. It is very important not to regard the practice as a burden; it should be thought of more as a time of pleasure.

Sitting position: Use the prescribed meditation *asanas*¹.

Place of practice: Choose a clean, peaceful atmosphere in which to practise. It should be well ventilated but not breezy. It should be dry but not hot. Don't sit on a cold floor. Place a blanket or rug beneath you. Leave a reasonable amount of space around you so that you are not disturbed by furniture or other objects. Try to use the same place daily.

Clothing: This depends on climatic conditions; however, your clothing should be as light as possible under the circumstances. Furthermore, your clothing should not be tight or interfere in any way with the breathing process.

If there are many flies, mosquitoes or other insects present, wrap a sheet or light blanket around you to keep them at bay. Alternatively, those people living in hot climates can remain under their mosquito netting. This is important, for it is very difficult to practise properly with flies and mosquitoes buzzing around you.

Sleep: It is normal for most people to sleep when they relax. However, this is not the aim of meditation practices. Some people may start to get up a little earlier than usual to do their yoga practices. These people in particular will often find it difficult to stay awake. Try not to sleep, for if you do you are really wasting your time waking early in the first place. If you want to sleep, then it is better to stay in bed. There are various methods of overcoming this tendency to sleep: one can go to bed earlier at night and/or take a shower before the practice or at any time that one feels sleepy. If you use cold water it is more drastic, but better. There

is an alternative method which works over a longer period of time: this is the method of autosuggestion. That is, suggest to yourself before your practice and at other times during the day that you will not fall asleep during meditation practice. If you say this with resolution, then the idea will take root in the subconscious mind.

Probably the best way to prevent sleep during meditation practice is to do asanas and pranayama beforehand. These techniques are excellent for inducing heightened wakefulness. Apart from this, they simultaneously bring about relaxation of the mind-body complex. As such they are powerful tools in obtaining the most from meditation techniques. For this reason we recommend asanas and pranayama as an integral part of your yoga practice program.

There are some people who feel exhausted after meditation practice. This is exactly the opposite feeling to that which is to be expected. Meditation should bring about relaxation. If it fails to do this, then it is a sure indication that you are not practising correctly. Most probably you are trying too hard to concentrate, instead of merely being aware and allowing the mind to wander. Don't fight and struggle with the mind as though it is an enemy to be subdued by force. Treat it more as a friend and try to coax it by gentle persuasion. Meditation should be a source of joy. It is a time when we tune in with deeper aspects of our nature. This cannot lead to fatigue. If it does, then check for mistakes in your method of practice.

Optimism and pessimism: Many people expect to experience meditation on their very first day of practice. This is most unlikely to happen. One should merely practise with perseverance and accept whatever comes. Even though you might not feel the exhilaration of meditation, you will definitely gain many other benefits, including a relaxed attitude to life and mental peace.

At times you will become disheartened and doubtful of the claims that are made for meditation. You will feel that perhaps you are wasting your time and chasing 'a castle in the sky'. Everyone experiences this feeling at one time or another. Don't despair for the transcendental experience of meditation is the heritage of all of us, the treasure of life waiting to be found.

Physical relaxation: The basic hurdles to overcome in meditation practices are physical pain, stiffness and general tension. It is an essential prelude to be able to forget the physical body. This is impossible if you are continually aware of aches and pains. There are various methods to systematically relax the whole body. The best method is a combination of asanas before attempting your meditation practices. In fact, asanas are designed specifically for this purpose.

If you don't have time to practise asanas, then there is an excellent method of bringing about reasonable relaxation of the body within a short time. The practice to use is naukasana². Briefly, naukasana tenses the whole body for a short time and then relaxes it again. Repeat a few times. This is an excellent method of attaining physical relaxation quickly. It works on the principle that after accentuated physical tension there is a tendency for the body to take the opposite extreme, namely relaxation.

There is another method in which the different limbs of the body are tensed as much as possible one after the other. Lie flat on your back in shavasana². Direct your awareness first of all to your right leg and tense it as much as possible for as long as you are able, without strain. Then release and relax. Then repeat with the left leg, the two arms, the fists, the abdomen, chest and shoulders, and finally the whole body. This should take about five minutes and is a rapid way of relaxing the body in preparation for meditation practice.

Mental relaxation: The whole point of meditation practices is to induce mental tranquility as a means to meditation. However, it is often difficult to progress with the practices because of emotional and mental tensions. Asanas and pranayama are excellent methods of calming even the most turbulent mind. This is another reason for practising asanas and pranayama before attempting meditation techniques.

Often we are overwhelmed by obsessive and persistent thoughts which have emotional overtones, such as jealousy, hatred, pride, fear and a multitude of others. These are not easy to remove. On no account should you suppress them, for they will only lie dormant in the subconscious mind. Let these lingering and exhausting thoughts arise but try to watch them with awareness. That is, look at

the thoughts as though they are something different from yourself, as though they are happening outside you. In this way they will lose their intensity and cease to overpower you. Of course prevention is better than cure. It is preferable that these emotionally loaded thoughts occur as little as possible in the first place. This can be done by adopting the rules we have already explained in previous discussions², together with constant practice of yoga in all its forms.

Actually the cause of tension is in the mind. Through meditation practice you will slowly come face to face with the source of these disturbances. People experience these agitations in many different forms. But they are only the manifestations. The cause or nucleus lies far deeper in our mental being. We will always be unhappy and emotionally disturbed while we have this nucleus existing within the subconscious mind. This core is in the form of a conflict or a complex of which our outside activities are merely a reflection. It is only by clearly seeing and understanding the subconscious problems that they can be removed. This is slowly but surely brought about by meditation practices. In this way one will become more and more mentally and emotionally relaxed. Furthermore, increasing benefits will be gained from the practices. The more you relax, the more you will be able to delve into the mind. Simultaneously, the more you delve into the mind, the more you relax. It is a two-fold process that occurs side by side.

Rational thought: Try to leave aside intellectual thinking when you do meditation practices for the aim of meditation is to transcend both rational and irrational thoughts. This is not an easy process. Don't suppress the continuous stream of thoughts, but again merely become aware of them. Try to absorb yourself in the practice at hand.

Vehicle for awareness: A symbol, process or sound is required to act as a vehicle to fix your attention so that your awareness may be directed into the mind. These will be suggested when we describe specific techniques. However, the reader may wish to find a suitable vehicle to suit his own personal tastes. You must know and be guided by what holds your attention most easily. It is not possible in this book to cater for all individual preferences. We can only indicate vehicles in general terms and

which we have found to be suitable for large numbers of people. Therefore, we give the following advice as an aid to help you find and choose that which is best for you.

Generally the vehicle of awareness is more powerful if it has some deep meaning or significance. You are more likely to be able to attain deep concentration if the object rivets or holds your attention, because your awareness is less likely to wander here and there, and will be directed into the realms of the mind. If the vehicle has little or no significance for you, then your awareness is most likely to be inattentive. Under these circumstances you might become frustrated and strain yourself in an endeavour to attain one-pointedness. This detracts from success and progress in meditation practices.

A vehicle of awareness can be almost anything. If you belong to a religious group, then you can use an image or form of God. That is to say, if you are Christian, then you are most likely to succeed in concentrating the mind if you use a picture or image of Christ or any great Christian saint. If you are Buddhist, then choose Buddha. If you are Hindu, then you can choose any of the incarnations or avatars of God, such as Krishna, Rama and so on. You must use your discretion in this respect. Only you can choose a symbol which has deep meaning for you.

If you don't belong to any religious group, then there are many other forms that you can choose instead. If you have a guru, then concentrate on his form, or you can concentrate on a cross, a yin yang symbol, the symbolic form of Aum, the breathing process, any mantra, a rose, a lotus, the moon, the sun, a candle, etc. We repeat, you can choose anything but you must feel an affinity and attraction for the object and be drawn to it without effort.

Most of us are fascinated by many things but without feeling any overwhelming attraction. Under these circumstances continue the practices that we give you. You will still make progress if you have the aspiration. Eventually, however, as you begin to explore the deeper realms of your mind, you will suddenly be confronted by a psychic symbol which has previously unknown significance for you. Even if you try to analyze the image, you may not be able to understand why it

is so compulsive. The symbol will almost overpower you with its intensity. Some people are completely surprised at the nature of the symbol which they find has great appeal for them. It may even be a symbol of a culture that is completely alien to your present way of life. Nevertheless, it is this symbol that you can adopt for your vehicle of awareness if you wish. You can either make a drawing of the symbol or you can develop the ability to create the symbol mentally in front of your closed eyes. The important thing is that the symbol is perfectly clear and vivid, whether mental or on paper. A useful vehicle of awareness is a body process, such as breathing. This is used in many techniques.

Some people, especially those who are more inclined towards abstraction, can use an idea or a question as a vehicle. This applies particularly in the realm of jnana yoga, where the practitioner totally absorbs himself in an enquiry about the nature of himself and existence. Or one can use abstract concepts such as the idea of infinity, compassion, eternity or love. However, these forms of vehicles for awareness are too difficult for most people, at least in the earlier stages of yoga practice. As such, we recommend that you adopt a process, symbol or object that is more concrete. Most of the meditation practices we will give will be of this more tangible type. Full details of this topic will be given when we describe specific practices.

Awareness: We have already extensively mentioned awareness under the other headings; however, we will again briefly summarize. The essence of meditation practice is to develop awareness. That is, awareness of the different realms of the mind. Without awareness, meditation is impossible.

Remember, awareness means that you must be a witness to processes within the mind as well as the process of the meditation techniques. In other words, you should feel apart from your thoughts. Don't lose yourself in them or associate with them. Merely watch the processes as though you are a spectator³. If your mind tends to wander and contemplate on other things apart from your practice, do not become frustrated or try to suppress this tendency. This happens to everyone. On some days we are so relaxed that our awareness automatically fixes itself on the vehicle of

awareness, without any effort. On the other hand, at other times our attention jumps around like a monkey in a tree. You must accept the bad with the good. The way to subdue the mind is to allow it to wander as it wishes and not to force it to concentrate. Give it free rein, but at the same time be aware of the fact that it is roaming, roving and rambling. In other words, simultaneously maintain awareness of the different thoughts of the mind, together with the process of the meditation practice in hand. After some time you will find that the mind will cease to wander – it will automatically become fixed on the practice. We emphasize again: do not force one-pointedness.

Sometimes the mind will be particularly disturbed. It will incessantly jump from one thought to the next, or be totally obsessed by a problem or some other emotional conflict in your life. An excellent method of overcoming this seemingly impossible situation, and in order to gain relaxation, is to chant a mantra over and over again. A good mantra is Aum, which under these circumstances should be chanted loudly and for as long as possible⁴. If you do this with intensity, it has an almost incredible calming influence on the mind. It is so simple yet very effective.

Notes

¹ Topic 2 of this lesson.

² The Art and Science of Relaxation – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
Relaxation: Shavasana (Part 2) – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

³ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 5

Meditation: Kaya Sthairyam

In this lesson we have devoted a lot of our attention to the subject of meditation and meditation asanas. We have emphasized how important it is to be able to sit in one position without movement and without the distraction of the physical body. The first aim of meditation practice is to forget the body. However, the following practice, *kaya sthairyam*, seems to contradict this basic rule. During this technique one tries to be aware of the body to the exclusion of everything else. That is, instead of forgetting the body, one must try to accentuate awareness of the body. At first this may seem a little paradoxical. However, it is based on a good understanding of the workings of the mind.

The mind is like a little child. If you order a child to do something, he will quite often do the opposite. There appears to be a rebelliousness, a need to defy. The mind acts in the same way. If you force the mind to forget the body and be aware of another subject, it seems to suddenly develop a fascination for the body. The more you try to forget the body, the more difficult it becomes. Knowing this tendency of the mind, this practice adopts a contrary approach. That is, it almost forces the mind to be aware of the body for a long period of time. The mind, as usual, rebels. The mind automatically tries to think of something else and it forgets the body. And this is exactly the aim of meditation practices. After practising *kaya sthairyam* intensely for even a few minutes you will find that the awareness spontaneously directs itself inwards. One will automatically start to introspect.

Kaya sthairyam is an excellent technique for preparing your body and mind for other meditative practices. As such, it should be practised whenever possible prior to other meditation techniques.

The Sanskrit word *kaya* means 'body'; the word *sthairyam* means 'steadiness'. Therefore, this practice induces steadiness of the body.

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative asana.

Adjust your position so that you feel the least possible discomfort.

Straighten the spine and hold the head erect.

Place the hands on the knees or in the lap.

Close your eyes and relax yourself completely.

Be aware of your whole body.

Feel that your body is part of the ground.

Imagine that your body is growing from the ground like a tree – your torso and head are the trunk, and your legs are the roots.

Convince yourself that because your body is part of the ground it cannot and will not move. You are as steady as a large tree.

Feel all the sensations of your body and if possible try to create a mental image of your body. Be aware of any aches or pains.

Direct your awareness to the source of this discomfort and try to be aware of nothing else. Let this pain be a focus for your awareness; this will not be difficult.

If your mind starts to wander, let it.

But simultaneously try to maintain your awareness of the pain in your body.

Continue for a few minutes.

Then direct your awareness to your right foot.

Be aware of nothing else but your right foot.

After a short time, transfer your awareness to the left foot.

Create a mental picture of the left foot and/or feel the sensations connected with it. Continue to be aware.

Transfer your awareness to your right leg, and repeat the process.

Repeat the same procedure in turn with your left leg, with your whole back, abdomen, chest, right arm, left arm, neck, head and finally the whole body.

This is 1 round.

Intensify your awareness as much as possible; that is even though your awareness may stray onto other subjects, maintain awareness of your body.

Do another round. Be aware.

Suggest to yourself that 'I will not move my body'. Make a resolve that you will be still, and will not move or shake throughout the whole practice. Your body must be like a statue – motionless.

Imprint the suggestions in your mind; in this way you will gain the most benefits from this practice. Even if you have the impulse to move a finger or a toe or to adjust your clothing or to scratch, try to overcome this urge.

When you feel the need to move you must say to yourself: "No, I will not move my body until the end of the practice."

Move your awareness to the different parts of the body. Feel the different parts of the body as you have never felt them before.

In this way continue the practice.

After some time you should find that your body becomes very stiff and rigid.

You will find that you become increasingly detached from your body. You will see your body as something separate from yourself.

You will find that your body feels as though it is weightless. You will find that you have less and less need or inclination to move the body. This stiffening of the body is called psychic stiffening. At this stage you are well prepared for other meditation practices in which your focal point of awareness is internal.

Duration

Practise as many rounds as you wish according to the time available. There are some people who have made great progress in meditation practices using only this technique. Some people practise this technique for hours and hours with great success. However, five or ten minutes practice before other meditation techniques is highly recommended.

Use as a preparatory technique

Kaya sthairyam, as we have already indicated, is an excellent meditative technique in its own right. However, its main use is to steady and relax the body, in preparation for other techniques. Furthermore, one of the biggest obstacles for most people in attaining successful meditation is the inability to forget the body. We are almost obsessed by the existence and sensations of the body. This prevents our awareness being directed elsewhere. Kaya sthairyam is a systematic technique for induc-

ing disinterest in the body. As such, it is a useful prelude to other practices.

Inattentiveness

It is a certainty that your awareness will not remain fixed on the body throughout the practice. You will become aware of other thoughts and distractions. Under no circumstances should you suppress this wandering tendency. This will only create tension. On the other hand, do not become so lost in thoughts that you pay no attention to the body. You must be simultaneously aware of both the body and any interfering thoughts that arise.

Prolonging the duration of meditative asanas

This is an excellent technique for progressively lengthening the time that one can remain in a meditative asana. First choose one of the meditative asanas already discussed¹. Then over a period of weeks and months progressively increase the time that you remain in the asana without movement. At first you should be realistic; in other words, only sit in the asana for as long as you can comfortably do so. Then each day gradually increase the duration. While sitting in the asana, practise kaya sthairyam. Make a resolve that you will remain in the asana for a prescribed length of time. Throughout try not to make the slightest movement even though you may feel discomfort. In this way, you will eventually gain mastery over the meditative asana. At the same time you are preparing yourself for meditation techniques, either immediately afterwards or some time in the future.

Notes

¹ Topic 2 of this lesson

Daily Practice Program

In order to gain mastery over at least one of the meditative asanas, we advise you to sit in any one them as much as circumstances and time will permit; for example while reading, watching television, talking or at any other

convenient time when you have to remain in one position. Furthermore, you should continue some of the leg loosening exercises whenever you have the time¹.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit you	10
Shavasana	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Poorna Titali Asana	—	3
Kauva Chalasana	—	3
Kashtha Takshanasana	—	3
Vayu Nishkasana	10 rounds	3
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	5
Stage 2	—	5
Preliminary to stage 3	—	5
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam	—	10
Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi (with Ujjayi Pranayama)	—	15
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	7
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	—	2
Utthanpadasana	2 times	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each side	2
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	4
Stage 2	—	4
Preliminary to stage 3	—	4
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam, Anuloma Viloma and Prana Shuddhi (with Ujjayi Pranayama)	—	10
		60

Program 3: duration ¾ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	35 each leg	2
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	2
Poorna Titali Asana	—	2
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each way	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 1	—	4
Stage 2	—	4
Preliminary to Stage 3	—	4
Meditation practice: Kaya Sthairyam	—	10
		45

Program 4: duration ½ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit you	6
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	1 each way	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 1	—	4
Stage 2	—	4
Preliminary to stage 3	—	4
		30

Try to find time to practise Kaya Sthairyam.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

Lesson 8

Just as Ananta (the serpent king) is the support of the whole earth, so too the support of all tantra and yoga is the serpent Kundalini.

If the guru's grace awakens Kundalini then she rises up, piercing all the lotuses (psychic centres) and the psychic knots: vishnugranthi, brahmagranthi and rudragranthi.

Then prana enters sushumna which is the highway of spiritual life and so the mind floats free of all supports and transcends the influence of time.

Sushumna, shunyapadavi, brahmarandhra, mahapatha, shmasana, shambhavi and madhyamarga – all these are the different names of the same sushumna. To awaken the goddess Kundalini who is sleeping at the entrance of sushumna one should practise mudras.

—*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:1–5)

Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is a controversial subject. Many people consider the possibility of becoming vegetarians, yet they are usually bombarded with conflicting viewpoints that take one extreme or another. It is generally discussed dogmatically, emotionally and with too much emphasis on moral aspects. This is a great pity, for many people, who would willingly become vegetarians if presented with a few reasonable and convincing advantages of vegetarianism over non-vegetarianism, are instead frightened away, often with a strong impression that vegetarians are fanatics.

The extreme advocates of vegetarianism urge everyone to immediately abstain from eating meat, in terms that suggest that if we don't we will 'drop into the fire of Hades'. They believe meat is an unnatural food. This, of course, is a matter of opinion, for meat has been eaten by man for countless generations throughout known history and long before. It therefore seems a little presumptuous to consider that meat is an unnatural food. How can it be unnatural if man can live off it and obtain many useful nutrients required by the body?

Other groups suggest that it is immoral to eat meat, for it necessitates destroying life. However, this implies that the law of nature is wrong; that lions, tigers and other carnivorous animals are committing 'sin'. This opinion cannot be correct, for it is a rule of physical existence that certain forms of life sustain themselves by killing and eating other forms of life. It is not immoral when a lion kills and eats a zebra; it is designed to act in this way. It is natural for a lion to kill and totally unnatural for a lion to start eating grass.

All arguments can continue in a circular path and this controversy is no exception, for the extreme follower of vegetarianism will say: "We agree that it is natural for certain animals to kill, but man is a more highly evolved being and it is a sign of this higher evolution that

one leaves meat eating." Well maybe, but is a banana plant superior to a lion because it does not eat meat? Of course this is a nonsensical comparison, only meant to illustrate that one can argue in circles while trying to justify vegetarianism from this point of view. Remember also that every form of life from man to plants destroys other forms of life; we are continually destroying small organisms, bacteria, etc. without even knowing it. The destruction of animals for meat eating is merely an obvious example. It is only for this reason that it is controversial. So we feel that any moralistic approach to meat eating is to be discarded as untenable, or at least highly disputable, and certainly is not a valid reason for most people to become vegetarian.

The non-vegetarian extremists assert that meat is an essential part of man's diet, which is needed to supply the body with proteins. They strongly state that without a regular intake of meat a person's health will drastically decline. What is forgotten here is that meat is not the only source of protein. There are many other foods available that can provide the body with its protein requirements.

It is also worthwhile pointing out that if we are able to choose to be vegetarian or non-vegetarian, then we are fortunate. Diet for much of the world's population is often more a matter of eating what is available than being able to choose a particular diet from a wide variety of foods. In some cases, all that is available is meat; for example, Eskimos through absolute necessity eat an exclusive diet of flesh. Are we to accuse the Eskimos of immoral habits because of their situation? On the other hand, people in other parts of the world are too poor to include meat in their diet. Are these people to be praised for being 'moral' or being vegetarians when they are merely following the dictates of necessity? So if you have the good fortune to be able to choose your eating habits, realize that it is a

privilege and be sure not to condemn others for not eating the same food as you do.

In this topic we will consider the subject of vegetarianism mainly from the point of view of nutrition and health. Because we are vegetarians, we will of course be biased on the subject. Yet because some of us in the ashram were once non-vegetarians, and have known the trauma of being subjected to and overwhelmed by zealous advocates of vegetarianism, we will try not to 'push vegetarianism down your throats.' We will present a few basic facts to you, the same facts that eventually persuaded us to adopt the vegetarian way of life. We will leave you to decide for yourself if these are valid reasons for seriously adopting vegetarianism.

What is vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism?

The term vegetarianism is applied to a number of different dietary habits. The generally accepted definition and understanding of vegetarianism is that it involves abstinence from eating animal flesh and related products. However, various forms of vegetarianism have arisen because of conflicting opinions regarding the suitability of eating eggs, dairy products and fish.

Strict vegetarians do not eat eggs, while many other people who also consider themselves vegetarians do. Eggs are often objected to on the grounds that they are carriers of life. However, it is worthwhile pointing out that in fact most eggs are unfertilized and so incapable of producing life. Other people eat fish and also claim to be vegetarians.

Ultra strict vegetarians go as far as to refuse to eat any type of dairy product, including milk. In India, where a large proportion of the population is vegetarian, milk is widely consumed, together with its derivatives, such as clarified butter (ghee).

The definition of vegetarianism depends on individual interpretation. However, for the purpose of this discussion we will define it as abstinence from eating animal flesh of any type. The term non-vegetarian will therefore be used to describe persons who include animal flesh in their diet.

To be or not to be a vegetarian

The main argument in favour of eating meat is that it is an excellent source of first class

protein, which is essential for proper growth and maintenance of the body. This beneficial property of meat is undeniable, but there are other factors not so favourable which should also be considered.

Modern methods of rearing animals for slaughter and human consumption often result in an end product which is contaminated with various chemicals. The use of artificial methods of stimulating an animal's growth is becoming alarmingly prevalent throughout the world. Hormones and other substances are administered to the animals in their food and by injection, along with other antibiotics and vaccines. These remain in the flesh after the animal is slaughtered and are eaten by the usually unsuspecting consumer. Exactly what effect these substances have on the human body will not be discussed here, for they are still the subject of present day research and of the future. But we do feel that these extraneous toxins must have some influence on our body, and are probably detrimental to health and well being.

Apart from all these artificially introduced substances, the flesh of dead animals is a wonderful breeding ground for germs. This can be dangerous if the meat is not cooked properly. Furthermore, meat contains natural waste materials and toxins, a by-product of every animal's normal living. When the meat is eaten, these waste products are taken into the human body and in turn must be expelled. Of course, the body is usually quite capable of doing this, yet at the same time this imposes an extra burden on the kidneys and the other organs of elimination.

Another important factor is that animal flesh contains adrenalin. This is a powerful hormone and stimulant, which is released into the blood during times of emergency. In other words, whenever an animal faces a possibly dangerous situation, adrenalin is immediately injected into the bloodstream, which in turn triggers the whole body to a state of tension and readiness for action. It is a necessary safety mechanism that is also an important part of the human body. Now when an animal is killed it is in a state of fear. A large amount of adrenalin is pumped into the blood, prior to death, and is retained in the flesh. As far as we know this adrenalin retains its potency and when the meat is eaten the effects are passed

on to the consumer. That is, the adrenalin from meat acts on the human system as though it came from the human adrenal glands under conditions of fear or stress. Whether the potency of adrenalin is destroyed by cooking is uncertain, but we feel it is a valid possibility that consumption of adrenalin in meat can lead to accentuated states of stress, which can only be detrimental to one's health.

The putrefaction of meat is another important consideration, especially in hotter climates. Meat, particularly liver, putrefies very rapidly, far more rapidly than non-flesh foods. This process produces highly noxious poisons formed by the bacteria present. These bacteria invade the large intestine by the billions after consuming meat, which in turn produces more and more toxic substances. This leads to disruption of the digestive processes and poisoning of the system, creating favourable conditions for infection and disease. Vegetarianism reduces this tendency.

Many diseases, particularly heart ailments would seem to be closely associated with heavy meat eating. For example, Eskimos seem to exist quite happily on an exclusive diet of meat. However, what is rarely appreciated is that they do not generally live for more than thirty years. Furthermore, the occurrence of heart ailments and arteriosclerosis is very high among these people.

Constipation has also been closely connected with meat eating. People who have become vegetarians have often noticed a great improvement in their bowel movement. Meat eating (especially over-consumption) has been associated with a wide variety of other ailments.

However, we cannot attribute the cause of these ailments solely to meat eating, for vegetarians also suffer from them. There are many other factors involved. We do feel, however, that a vegetarian diet helps to reduce the likelihood of certain diseases occurring.

So far, we seem to have devoted most of this discussion to pointing out the disadvantages of eating meat. This is necessary, for it is only the disadvantages associated with eating meat that indicate the advantages of vegetarianism. If there are no drawbacks to meat eating then for most of us there would be little reason to become vegetarian. If there were positive benefits to eating meat then it would

seem justified to continue. But what are the advantages of eating meat? It is doubtless a reasonably good source of protein, but as we will point out later, there are better vegetarian sources. Meat does contain the vital minerals iron and phosphorus, together with some of the vitamin B complex. However, these can be obtained quite adequately from other vegetarian foods. So while we would like to give a list of the advantages of meat over other forms of food, we feel that there are not many known at present.

At this stage it is worthwhile clearing up a common misconception. Many people believe meat to be an excellent source of energy; without it we will wallow in a state of lethargy. Due to this reason many people eat enormous amounts of meat. Actually meat, like other protein foods, is not the ideal type of food for providing the body's energy demands. The best foods for providing energy are the carbohydrates and fats, such as bread, cereals, butter, etc. The body has a certain protein requirement in order to build up and rejuvenate all worn out cells. If more than this amount is taken into the body through digested food, the body merely uses the excess for providing its energy needs. This is not very economical, for protein foods, including meat, generally are far more expensive than foods containing carbohydrates and fats. Also, the proteins that are used in this manner tend to leave certain residues or 'ashes' in the body as a by-product, which have to be eliminated by the kidneys, placing a greater load on these often overworked organs. So, in fact, meat and other high protein foods are not the best foods to obtain your energy requirements. Also, note that your daily protein needs are surprisingly low under normal conditions of health (60 gm) and so it is not necessary to consume large amounts of protein food, whether meat, milk, nuts or any other form of protein source.

What happens if one replaces meat by vegetable substitutes? Of course one will avoid the disadvantages connected with eating meat that we have already described. Furthermore, it is easier for the digestive system to process vegetarian food. There are less waste products for the body to eliminate after digestion compared to meat eating. This is itself a convincing argument for vegetarianism, for if the body can assimilate the food more easily

there is less effort involved. The digestive system will be less likely to break down or suffer ailments, and at the same time will be able to resist the onset of disease. Furthermore, the body will be able to conserve more of its energy, using it for other purposes. One will tend to become healthier and have more zest in everyday life.

Throughout history many sages and yogis have advocated vegetarianism as the preferred way of life. This has not only been the case in India; some of the Greek philosophers, such as Archimedes, urged people to become vegetarians. They said this for a good reason, knowing that there is a definite relationship between what we eat and our state of mind. This is not surprising for the mind and body are intimately connected. This is clearly shown when we consider the rapid and direct influence that alcohol has on human behaviour both emotionally and mentally; the same too with various drugs. It is a fair assumption to say that the food we eat also has profound repercussions on our emotional and mental attitudes. Throughout the ages, it has been said that meat eating is conducive to internal tension and disharmony, whereas vegetarian food tends to promote inner calmness.

This doesn't mean that eating certain types of food will automatically make you calm; far from it, for your mental state is mainly dependent on inner conflicts and problems. But eating certain types of food in preference to others is conducive to attaining relaxed states of mind. Deeper relaxation of the mind, however, can only come by cleaning out all the inner dross. So by becoming a vegetarian, we feel that one is laying down a firm foundation for a harmonious and happy life. And this is the stepping stone to higher awareness. This does not mean you cannot attain higher states of awareness if you are non-vegetarian; this cannot be true, for some systems use meat as an integral part of their ritual under specific circumstances and there have been meat eating sadhakas, but vegetarianism is a help, though perhaps a small one, in starting to tread the path to higher awareness.

If you are still not yet convinced that vegetarianism is preferable to non-vegetarianism, there is one more factor that may sway your mind. The cost of meat is generally far more than most vegetarian foods, and so by

becoming a vegetarian it is possible to obtain a highly nutritious diet at less expense.

The how of vegetarianism

Before even considering discarding meat from your diet, it is important to know what foods to eat in order to maintain the body's protein supply. It is often a surprise to many people to discover that there are numerous excellent vegetable sources of proteins, some of which contain, weight for weight, more protein than any meat. Soya bean for example, is a remarkable food that has been used by the Chinese and other Oriental people for centuries. Nearly forty percent of soya bean is pure protein. This is about twice that of meat and four times that of eggs, wheat and other cereals. There are many other fine foods that contain a high percentage of protein, the most well-known being nuts of all types, lentils, sunflower seeds, milk, yoghurt, cheese and other dairy products.

One thing is certain, you will always obtain your protein supply if you eat a reasonably varied vegetarian diet. People often say that vegetarian food is tasteless and monotonous compared to non-vegetarian food. This is often true, but only because of the unskilful preparation of the dishes and the lack of imagination on the part of the cook. There are various vegetarian cookery books available, giving a wide variety of dishes that are every bit as tasty as non-vegetarian cooking.

Yoga and vegetarianism

It is assumed by many that vegetarianism is an integral part of yoga practice. This belief is only partially true, for while yoga views vegetarianism as the most beneficial system of nutrition, it does not for an instant insist that all practitioners of yoga become vegetarians. Vegetarianism does find a place in yoga only insofar as it is the preferred nutritional system whereby total body health can be obtained in preparation for the higher forms of yoga. Non-vegetarians are, however, heartily accepted as practitioners of yoga.

Yoga advises but does not preach vegetarianism. One of the basic aims of yoga is to tune the body to a high degree of sensitivity and this is more easily achieved by abstaining from meat. Remember, yoga aims to bring about mental peace and tranquillity as well as

physical relaxation. This is also more easily obtained if one does not eat meat. Further, meat has a tendency to be a greater repository of toxins and waste products than vegetarian food.

In conclusion

If you are not sure whether you can obtain all your nutritional needs of the body from a vegetarian diet, then you should not become one. But if you study any charts given on this subject you will clearly see that all the body's requirements – fats and carbohydrates, proteins, vitamins and minerals – are obtained in more than adequate quantities in vegetarian foods. If you are still not convinced, then consider the practical experience of vegetarians. The fact that innumerable people are vegetarians and have been for aeons in many parts of the world as a way of life, shows that vegetarianism does not lead to nutritional deficiency. On the contrary, it leads to wonderful health and a new lease on life.

We feel that Manu, the codifier of laws in ancient India, summed up the most sensible approach to the whole subject when he said: "There is no wrong in eating meat or drinking wine, but abstention therefrom gives many benefits."

Meditation and the Mind

Any definition of the mind is bound to be very limited and arbitrary. For example, modern psychology roughly divides the mind into three parts: the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. It is very easy to regard these definitions as fixed quantities or specific areas of the mind. Furthermore, one is inclined to gain the impression that the subconscious (below consciousness) and unconscious (beyond consciousness) regions of the mind are strictly and permanently inaccessible to conscious perception. This is a common belief but totally wrong. All regions of the mind are accessible to our awareness. That is, the so-called unconscious mind is only unconscious because of severe limitations in the freedom and scope of our awareness. Similarly, the subconscious mind is only below our conscious perception due to lack of awareness. If we develop our awareness, then the unconscious mind and the subconscious mind would no longer be unreachable and unperceivable. This is the case with someone who is self-realized; all the realms of the mind are within reach of his awareness. For him no part of the mind is truly unconscious or subconscious. This is important and applies to everyone; we are only unconscious of different parts of the mind because of restrictions and imprisonment of our awareness within a confined field.

We should be careful not to assume that any scientific, religious or philosophic division of the mind has any relationship with truth. It is merely an arbitrary division and classification. The mind is an indivisible whole. In a garden we might plant different areas with different vegetables and call them different plots; nevertheless this partition is only for convenience. These plots of land, no matter what vegetables they contain, are still an integral and inseparable part of the whole garden. Similarly, any classification of the realms of the mind is only a means to describe different aspects within the mind as a whole.

The purpose of this topic is to divide the mind into separate parts, but only as a means to describe how meditation practices relate to phenomena within the mind. In this way we hope to throw practical light on the nature of the mind and understand its relation with meditation.

It is generally assumed that the mind is that which is contained in the brain. This seems so obvious that few of us ever question its truth. Various great philosophers have said that the area or extent of the mind is either infinite or microscopic. Thus there are three possible theories of the mind: that the mind is atomic in size, brain-sized or macrocosmic in size. Let us consider these three speculations.

The brain-enclosed mind

Most people tend to take it for granted that the mind is identical with and imprisoned in the brain. When we think, we assume that the process occurs within our head. If we indicate to someone that we are thinking, we point towards the head. Strangely enough, the feeling or emotional aspect of our personality is often regarded as being elsewhere. In other words, our emotional nature, which is intimately linked with our mental nature, is often said to be in the region of the heart. There are even some particular primitive tribes that assign no specific place in the body for the thinking process. We are not trying to imply that nothing happens in the brain. Far from it. The brain is a multi-dimensional biocomputer but at the same time we must be open to new and more plausible possibilities. For example, recent scientific experiments in various countries have indicated that thoughts can go beyond the confinement of the brain. Scientists have found that if a man has strong negative emotional thoughts, he can quickly influence people in his surroundings. Tests have been conducted in a room full of people who were relaxed both emotionally and mentally, where

there was a noticeable atmosphere of friendship present. Then another man entered the room, who was disturbed mentally and emotionally. The atmosphere quickly changed. Many of the people in the room had to leave after a few minutes; they could not stand the new negatively charged vibrations. This outcome indicates that the scope of the mind is beyond the confinements and restrictions of the brain. In other words, our mental faculties seem to extend beyond the walls of the brain and the body.

Even if we accept that our mind can extend outside the brain, we all still retain the belief that people have a separate mind. This is a logical conclusion if we assume that the mind is encased within the brain. Yet some people have conceived of the individual brain as being more of a receiver than a source. That is, the brain is a focal point for occurrences beyond the brain. The brain still sorts out mental data in relation to the needs of the body, yet at the same time it is an instrument for something infinitely greater.

The infinite mind

Large numbers of mystics, yogis and other wise men throughout history have conceived and emphatically declared that the mind transcends the limitations of the physical brain. In modern psychology this possibility was clearly put forward by Jung when he postulated that an enormous part of the mind was the unconscious, or collective aspect. He suggested that within the collective unconscious part of the mind there are an infinite number of mental contents common to all of us. He suggested that each person has the ability, though rarely developed, to contact data that is available to everyone. An often quoted analogy is given of a large number of islands in the sea. Each of these islands is in fact the top of a mountain which has its base in the seabed. From the surface of the sea the islands or mountain peaks have individuality. Yet from the viewpoint of the seabed the islands or individuals are seen to have their function in a common base. In other words, the islands which appear separate are actually connected with each other by the seabed. Yet because we cannot see this common connection, we automatically assume that the islands are totally separated

and different from each other. It is the same with the mind. Everyone sees himself as an island and looks at other islands, other people, and sees separateness. This individuality does exist from a superficial point of view. This is why people have different personalities – different tastes, different likes, dislikes and other individual attributes that define the unique character of a person. However, if we could dive deeper into our mind, we would make the incredible discovery that the mind of each of us, in its deeper aspects, is one and the same thing. There is no difference. We are not saying that they are similar; we are saying they are one and the same.

Our immediate response to this idea on a rational level is that it is impossible. This reaction is understandable because we see our character as the island; we don't see ourselves in our deeper aspect, the sea bed. We feel, through conditioning, that our mind is only in our head. The acceptance of this unity of mind in each person (i.e. collective unconscious) implies that the mind transcends the physical boundaries of the head and this is difficult to believe. In fact we don't want you to see this on a rational level. Instead of an intellectual discussion we would much prefer you to practise meditation techniques and find out for yourself.

Most people are scientifically inclined, therefore let us approach this possibility of an all pervading mind from a scientific point of view. Scientists in recent times have been trying to fathom atomic structure. They found that various scientific models of the atom and its paths could no longer fit experimental and observed facts. The existing and widely accepted theories, such as Bohr's model, began to break down in the light of experience.

Various experiments showed that the electron is not a material particle; it is something more, even more than a wave pattern. Before these experiments the electron was regarded as the building block of the universe – the ultimate particle, in fact. Old theories have had to be discarded, not only of the atom but of the cosmos. Scientists, in a way more characteristic of mystics, have begun to pose the possibility that the materialistic universe that we see with our eyes is not the ultimate reality. What seems obvious to us is being disowned by progressive thinkers. They have suggested that underlying

the material universe is some deeper reality. It is even suggested that our present assumptions regarding the nature of time and space are incorrect and unrealistic.

Some mathematicians, working with more intangible concepts, have suggested that the material universe is permeated by a universal medium or substratum. This medium is pervaded by waves of inconceivable frequency and velocity, well beyond even electromagnetic waves of the highest known frequencies. It is suggested that these so far undetected waves pulsate throughout the whole substratum.

From this theory atomic scientists are more able to understand the behaviour of atomic particles. They can foresee the possibility that an atomic particle is no more than a build-up of these wave amplitudes one upon the other. We cannot and do not see these waves. What we do see is the manifestation in the form of what we call matter. We tend to assume that this matter is more solid than we think, but actually it is our senses that interpret matter as matter. In accordance with the ideas of some modern scientists, what we see as matter seems to be no more than an accumulation of waves. In other words the physical universe which we perceive and which seems so real is no more than a gossamer substance without solidity. It is the manifestation of the underlying, hidden substratum. Is it the 'dream of Brahman' that Indian yogis exclaim is the nature of the manifested universe?

Is it asking too much to suggest that this substratum is the same as the seabed in relation to the islands? In other words, that each of us physically and mentally, on a superficial plane, is no more than a manifestation of the underlying, all pervading and infinite substratum. That is, we are implying that this underlying medium is the same as the cosmic mind. Each person is intimately connected with this hidden cosmic mind and not only has access to its infinite potential, but each of us is essentially the same in essence! The mind of each of us is exactly the same thing; however, to know this we must explore its depths. This is the realm of meditation.

Various eminent scientists have now declared that the universe is beginning to look more like an all encompassing mind than anything else. Some of them have even suggested that all atomic particles are nothing but mind-stuff. In

this respect they are echoing the affirmations of various mystics throughout the ages. Let us take a few examples. It was the well-known poet Emerson who wrote:

*Substances at base divided,
In their summits are united.
There the holy essence rolls,
One through the separated souls.*

This is echoed in the ancient yogic text called the *Yoga Vasishtha*: "Know that there is a mental mechanism everywhere. It resides within each particle; it extends into space; it is within the heart of a vegetable; it functions as fluid within a leaf; it rains as a cloud; it lies as a stone; it plays in the waves of the ocean; it penetrates massive mountains; and it assumes the shape of the size of an atom." (Ill: 40, 21-23) And it was Shakespeare in *The Tempest* who wrote with sublime simplicity: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on . . ."

In our previous discussion on prana we described scientific research and discovery into the essence of the bioplasmic or pranic body¹. You will remember that the Russian scientists conducted practical experiments which clearly revealed the existence of a field of force around and within the body. They called it bioplasma; we call it prana. Others have called it the aura, among other names. This subtle body was photographed by means of high frequency Kirlian photography. Without use of a high frequency electric field, we are not able to see the highly complex pranic field.

Yet when photographed under the prescribed conditions it manifested as the highly complex and organized iridescent bioplasmic or pranic aspect of our being. Though within the realm of supposition, it is more than a possibility that as higher and higher frequency electrical fields are used, so we will see more and more subtle aspects of our existence of which we are at present unaware.

It seems more than a possibility that the pranic body and the yet scientifically undiscovered higher frequency substances are the link that each of us has with the cosmic substratum or mind. In fact this seems more than a supposition, for Russian scientists dealing with the subjects of telepathy and other psychic phenomena, have actually measured changes in the state of the bioplasmic body

during psychic events. In other words, they were able to detect changes in the bioplasmic body of a telepathic receiver when he was receiving messages from a telepathic transmitter who was often many hundreds of miles away. These experiments seem to lead us to the conclusion that each person has the capacity to directly connect with other people through the medium of the cosmic mind.

In fact many psychics, clairvoyants, etc. have said that there is an etheric energy body (pranic body) which connects the brain cells with the cosmic mind. Others have put it differently by saying that this etheric body is the means by which the life energies of the universe and the collective unconscious can communicate with the physical body. It seems that we are far more intimately connected with each other and can communicate directly with each other in a far deeper sense than is often considered. Each individual has vast powers. However, these faculties are rarely used; in fact, we tend to sneer and be sceptical of any truth in telepathy, clairaudience, clairvoyance and other psychic powers.

The aim of meditation is to dive deeper into this substratum so that we can intimately contact and be aware of its potential. When we do so, it seems to whisper to us subtle answers to the seemingly unsolvable riddles of the universe. This is perhaps why we can experience intuitive flashes; it is a time when we contact the basic substratum of existence. In psychological terms we could say that it is a time when we connect our awareness with the collective unconscious. Within this storehouse is contained all the knowledge that ever has been and ever will be.

This underlying matrix is the background of existence, inanimate and animate. Nearly all life forms seem to see and know only the material world around them. It is only in evolved forms of life, such as man on the planet earth, who have the ability to occasionally contact this underlying foundation of existence. We have the gift, though rarely used, to look behind the scenes. We have the potential to look behind the curtain of maya (usually translated as illusion, but better translated as misperception or misunderstanding of reality). Each of us is able to transcend our physical limitations and experience knowledge, bliss and timelessness, where beginning and end

have no meaning and where there is no past, present or future. This is the aim of meditation: to dissolve into the underlying essence of all things.

We emphasize that we don't expect you to believe or accept what we have written. Why should you? We want you to try meditation techniques and find out what meditation is all about for yourself.

The atomic mind

The mind has also been conceived as being atomic. This seems an obvious contradiction to the infinite mind speculation but, as we will see, this is not so. It is only recently that scientists have begun to appreciate the wonder and complexity of each cell in our body. They have built a complicated model representing the structure of the so-called DNA molecule, known as the molecule of life. They believe this molecule to be the storehouse and transmitter of characteristics of a mother and father to their child. It is contained within the sperm and ova, and indeed in every cell in the body.

It is the DNA molecule that determines the characteristics of each person. It fixes or decides the colour of our eyes, hair, height and so many other features and traits which determine our life. It fixes our sex and growth pattern. That is, it decides the way in which we live in everyday life; it is the blueprint that fixes our mode of living. Of course other factors such as the environment and interaction with other people will simultaneously influence our lives. Nevertheless the DNA molecule is a primary influence.

Scientific thinkers are exclaiming in awe that there is far more retained within the DNA molecule than we can imagine. They declare that within each DNA molecule there is the total information, experience and knowledge of our evolutionary past. They say that every cell contains a memory of everything that has happened in each individual's past. This includes when life existed only in the primordial mud in the form of germs and basic amoeba. It includes the story of how life developed in the sea and finally emerged on to the land. It contains the most incredible data which few of us have ever experienced during our lives. It also includes a memory of the experience when the individual was in his mother's womb, when he was born, and he

grew up. All this information – the collective unconsciousness in fact – is contained in each and every cell. It sounds as though it is fiction, but it is precisely what the most prominent scientists of today are suggesting.

Are we to conclude that each cell is the centre of the mind, that it is atomic in nature? This incredible potential of each cell relates very closely to the idea of the infinite mind. As we pointed out, many scientists conceive of infinite vibrations or waves permeating the substratum of the whole universe. We suggested that this substratum is no more than the cosmic mind. Certain scientists have suggested that an atomic particle is no more than a particular accumulation of these vibrations in one place. In the same way, each atomic particle has access to the whole knowledge and potential of the cosmic mind. If we accept this, then we can say that each cell is no more than the points where these wave amplitudes reinforce each other. That is, each cell is intimately and directly connected with the underlying cosmic mind. In this sense, the atomic mind and the cosmic mind are really one and the same thing. There is no contradiction.

Actually mystics throughout the ages have always declared that infinite knowledge exists within each of us. They have said: "As above, so below." (*Hermetic saying*)

"What is here is there; what is not here is nowhere." (*Visvasara Tantra*)

"... that which appears without only appears so because it exists within." (*Shaivite maxim*)

The mystics have affirmed that each of us is a miniaturized version of everything, of the whole universe. To know this, however, one must dive into the depths of the mind; the method of exploration is meditation.

Modern psychological classification of the mind

We have spent some time describing three theories of the mind. It was not meant to convince you of anything; only to open your eyes to new possibilities beyond the normal realms of thought. Also we wanted to show that previously irreconcilable scientific ideas and mystical or yogic ideas are fast approaching each other. Only a few years ago they seemed so distant and contradictory in most cases, yet now they are beginning to say essentially the same thing.

In order to explain or at least indicate the direction that meditation practices will take in relation to the mind, we will adopt a modern psychological division of the mind. Remember, it is only arbitrary in definition, it is a means to an end and not intended to describe the mind as it really is. However, it is a very convenient system to adopt for a reasonably clear explanation and understanding.

The mind is divided into four realms: the lower or instinctive, the rational, the illuminative and the collective unconscious. Let us define these divisions in turn.

The lower mind: This section of the mind is concerned with coordination and activation of the different parts and organs of the body. It synchronizes the systems of respiration, circulation, digestion and other processes. It is the computer which ensures that all the different parts of the body function harmoniously so that the body acts as a coordinating unit.

It is also the source of our instinctive urges such as hunger, thirst, procreation, self-preservation and other basic drives. These instincts are often so powerful that they overwhelm the rest of the mind. This part of the mind is the source of our complexes, phobias, conflicts and other mental problems that can make life miserable. These obsessions are generally charged with intense emotions. It is the storehouse of the compulsions that motivate most of our actions.

The rational mind: This is the part of the mind from which we generally operate during the waking state. This part is the most accessible to our awareness. It is the reservoir of rational thinking, for it is here that data accumulated from everyday experience is stored. It is also the region where the incoming data is analyzed and compared with previous memories so that logical deduction or thoughts arise to conscious perception. In fact, the very thoughts that we are thinking right now are probably from this part of the mind. It is the problem solving realm of the mind, which gives us answers as we require them. Most of this problem solving occurs without our awareness. For example, many of us have had a question which defied answers at a certain time, yet without our knowing it, the problem was being tackled in the rational part of the mind, so that at a later time the answer suddenly

flashed to conscious perception. Or one tries to remember someone's name and cannot, then suddenly it surfaces at a later time. This is the work of the rational or logical mind.

The illuminative mind: This is often known as the realm of superconsciousness or of genius. It is from this part of the mind that we receive intuitive flashes or inspirations. Without this region the great artists would not have been able to create their masterpieces nor scientists to receive insight into the phenomena of the universe. It is from here that the great saints and yogis gain their revelations, deeper knowledge, bliss and transcendental experiences.

Very few people are aware of this part of the mind. We tend to be imprisoned by the chains of the rational lower mind. This region has been generally and sadly neglected by psychologists in the past. It is only recently that there has been a wide interest in this area. For example, notable psychologists such as Frankl and Maslow are propounding height or depth psychology, and have made steps to investigate this aspect of the mind scientifically.

The collective unconscious: This is the part of the mind that was brought to light in psychological circles by Jung. It is that part of the mind which contains a complete record of our evolutionary past. It is a realm of unimaginable and immeasurable depth that contains the information and activities of our ancestral past. It is the reservoir of archetypes that has accumulated or perhaps guided us over the period of millions of years, though we could say that it is beyond definition in terms of time. Some people regard it as the inner equivalent of the story of creation and the universe. In short, it is an infinite blueprint of the inner and outer cosmos. Actually, whether it is outside or inside is a debatable point, as we have indicated in the description of the infinite and the atomic mind. Certainly it is that which links all of us together.

We must emphasize again that this classification is only a means to describe the mind. It is not intended that this description represents the mind in real terms, for this is impossible.

The lower and rational aspects of the mind contain the traits that define our individual personality. The superconscious and collective unconscious realms are, on the other hand, suprapersonal. That is, they transcend indivi-

duality and are the common ground of all of us. Actually, the superconscious division can probably be regarded as an integral part of the collective unconscious, but we have divided them for convenience of description. The superconscious realm is that part of the collective unconscious from which we get our most sublime illuminations. The rest of the collective unconscious contains the accumulated experience of existence: that which is beautiful and that which is ugly, that which seems relevant and that which seems irrelevant to our lives. Of course these are subjective responses, for the collective unconscious is really neutral in its nature; it is no more than a recording of that which has happened and that which is. It is the voice of the universe without personal preferences. It is designated good or bad only by our individual tastes, likes and dislikes.

The reader should be careful not to assume that the collective unconscious and the superconscious aspects of the mind are fenced in and situated in a certain location. It is in a sense everywhere, under, above, within and without; it transcends the individualized mind.

Further, there is an increasing tendency to understand that the collective unconscious (cosmic mind) not only contains the blueprint of the past but also the blueprint of the future. Thus, each of us has the potential not only to be aware of our ancestral past, but of the future, of things to come. We don't ask you to believe this, but this easily explains the widely experienced phenomena of prophecy. A person who tells future events is merely a person who manages to be aware of this particular part of the collective unconscious.

The reader should also take care not to presume that there is a rigid demarcation between the personal and impersonal aspects of the mind. This division in fact does not exist; each merges into the other as imperceptibly as the earthly atmosphere blends with and fuses into the surrounding space.

Meditation and illumination of the stratas of the mind

Having spent much time and space playing around with words in an effort to describe a convenient concept and model of the mind, we will now consider meditation and its relationship with different mental phenomena.

The aim of meditation practices is to direct our normally extroverted awareness into the domains of the mind. Consider the personal levels of the mind (i.e. the instinctive and the logical) as represented by the face of a wall. The bottom half depicts the instinctive mind and the upper half the rational mind. The area outside the wall stands for the suprapersonal mind, the superconscious realm being above and the collective unconscious below. It is night time, so you can not see the wall or the surroundings; however, you have a torch and the light beam represents your awareness. The beam is small in diameter so that it does not light up the whole wall and surroundings, only a small area of the surface. During normal wakefulness the beam of our awareness only lights up the rational part of the mind or the upper part of the wall. Therefore, we operate on a predominantly logical level throughout life. Our awareness moves from one thought to the next but within the confines of the rational mind.

During meditation practices the aim is to direct the beam of awareness downwards, so that it lights up the lower mind or even the suprapersonal mind beyond the area of the wall. Many people, when they make a little progress in meditation practice, start to see grotesque visions and apparitions, monsters and devils, or they suddenly come face to face with deep rooted conflicts, complexes and phobias. They are most surprised and often upset when they see these phenomena, for they did not previously conceive or know that they existed within their mind.

At this state the light of awareness is directed downwards to the lower level of the mind – the instinctive mind. The awareness leaves its usual arena and starts to highlight the instinctive nature, with its desires, obsessions, hatreds and prejudices. We experience the manifestation of our problems continually for they surface during everyday life in the form of emotional outbursts, anger, depression, restlessness and many other stressful life reactions. However, we do not normally know their root or source. When one's awareness explores the lower mind, we confront the seed of these problems. When they are known they can be removed; in fact they automatically drop away.

Before one can transcend the lower mind and direct the beam of awareness outside the

limitations of the wall or the personal mind, these disturbances and memories have to be exhausted. The lower mind has to be purged of its clutter and unwanted dirt. One's awareness is almost drawn towards the lower mind as iron filings are attracted to a magnet; it is almost as though one's awareness is compelled to explore it and clean it out. Or, more likely, the lower mind acts as a veil that prevents us seeing into the deeper aspects of the mind. It is only when this fog of problems is removed that we can experience what is beyond.

It is only when the beam of awareness looks beyond the wall to the unconscious and the superconscious realms that meditation begins. We transcend both rational and instinctive thought. We enter the sphere of suprapersonal experience – the domain of our ancestral experiences and intuitive, inspirational flashes. This is the land beyond words, which defies rational explanation. Only personal encounter can convince you of its truth.

The culmination of meditation is enlightenment, where one is overwhelmed with the light of truth; when one knows the joy of knowledge that sages have known throughout the ages; when one realizes the reality behind existence along with one's own identity and that of others. One realizes the core of existence is the Self, that each of us is a limitless storehouse of knowledge and energy.

The inner and the outer world

Passive meditation techniques allow one to dive into the inner depths of the mind. The more one cleans out the personal lower mind, the happier one will become in interaction with the outside world during day to day life. One will harmonize with external activities instead of fighting with them. One will be peaceful instead of continually tense.

The deeper one delves into inner realms, the more one sees reality in the outside world. One will realize that there is actually little or no difference between the outer and inner realms of existence. The difference only appears to be because of logical thinking and the lack of understanding of our real nature. It was Christ who said: "When the outside becomes the inside, then the knowledge of Heaven has come".

Many people have the misconception that meditation practices that are introspective in

nature lead one away from participation in worldly activities. This is far from the truth. In fact, just the opposite is true – one's external actions, that is, the surface expressions of inner nature, will be far more powerful and intense. The deeper one explores the inner domains, the greater the force of expression in external activities. One's whole life, work, play, etc. will be executed with joy, efficiency and strength. One will be able to accomplish things that seemed previously well beyond one's ability. Knowledge of the inside leads to knowledge of the outside. Higher awareness of the world inside the mind leads to higher awareness of the world outside of you.

Eventually passive meditation techniques become superfluous. They are no longer necessary when one lives in a continual state of meditation. One's activities become a continuous, joyful and spontaneous experience of meditation. No longer is there conflict between the outer and the inner world.

Knowledge and meditation

There are different types of knowledge. The knowledge that most of us have is rational knowledge, derived from the logical region of the mind. We nearly always act from this part of the mind and assume that the highest and only form of knowledge is rational. In fact, intellectual knowledge is almost worshipped by people throughout the world, yet it is only relative knowledge derived from a limited number of facts and figures. From this we deduce theories, concepts and other ideas. This is the way we reason in scientific, technological and philosophical fields.

Each of us makes the mistake of assuming that logical answers are infallible. We are habituated to believing that logical answers are the only answers. We fail to realize the fallacy that because the facts from which we derive the answers are limited, so also the answers in turn must be inadequate. It is so easy to fall into the trap of believing that all the facts are in front of us, and hence the conclusion we reach through reasoning is absolutely correct. The natives of darkest Africa a few centuries ago must have automatically assumed that all men were dark skinned, for they had never seen a person from another race. Then they saw the white skinned explorer, which destroyed their simple logical deduction. Then they had to say

that men were both dark and light skinned, but then they met yellow skinned men and again they had to update their rational thoughts on the skin colours. It is the same with scientific theories. They are always being changed in the light of new data that becomes available. When Newton expounded his theory of gravitation it became an almost infallible law. Even today in schools it is regarded as the truth, yet many years ago Einstein proved that it was incorrect. Newton's theory was shown to be wrong in the light of new information. This is continually happening, yet all of us tend to assume that rational deductions are infallible.

It is the same with everyday rational thinking; it is only correct in relation to the facts that we have in front of us. We make decisions all day in rational terms, but they are only true in a relative sense. For example, a man asks the way to the farm where Mr. Smith lives. We give directions with certainty and clarity, yet we are totally wrong, as the man eventually finds out. The Smith family, unknown to us, moved to another part of the country one week before. Had we known this we could have given a more correct answer, but we did not and so our logical deduction was completely wrong. In a strange country far away, the inhabitants have an 'unusual method of giving directions. Their sense of logic is slightly different to other people in surrounding countries. Ask them where Mr. Smith's farmhouse is and they will reply something like the following: "You walk for half an hour down this road until you see a brown cow in the field; there you turn right and walk until you meet Mrs. Brown going for her early morning stroll. Keep on walking and the house that you want will be the one that you see when you hear an owl hooting good luck." The person has made the same journey himself once, and because of his particular form of reasoning he assumes that your experiences on the journey will be the same as his. You will have great trouble finding the house that you seek, let alone finding the cow in the first place. Yet this is a logical deduction, but in a severely limited sense. The man giving the directions is not aware of the fact that his experiences on the journey will be different from yours. Logical or rational knowledge is relative and can only give relative truth.

There is another form of knowledge that arises in the form of a feeling or an emotional response. We occasionally feel that something is true. It is not tangible in a mental sense but is a vague sense of knowing something. This is very often mistaken for intuitive knowledge.

The next type of knowledge is called transcendental knowledge, which is attained in states of meditation. It is known in the form of intuition or illumination. The difference in this type of knowledge is that it comes from a totality of a situation. In other words, the whole arena of information is available and from this the answer is comprehended. In a sense it is like rational knowledge, but instead of a few facts, all the information is there to be used. This intuitive form of knowledge apprehends the totality of a situation; it sees the whole picture, nothing is missing. This comes from the superconscious realms of the mind during states of meditation. Rational knowledge is often warped by personal preferences and prejudices. Intuitive knowledge is independent of all personal traits and projections.

How is this possible? How are we able to contact deeper, intuitive knowledge during meditation? Any explanation is bound to be insufficient, but if you refer back to the picture we painted at the beginning of this topic regarding the infinite mind, a superficial understanding is possible. Normally we are aware only of our limited, personal and rational mind. This is the island rising above the sea. Yet beyond and deeper than this personal mind is the suprapersonal aspect of the mind, the seabed, from which all the islands arise. It is the realm of higher and more subtle vibrations that permeate the cosmos and existence. They are always present, yet during normal states of awareness they are not perceivable. During meditation a direct link is made between one's awareness and these higher domains of the mind. From this comes higher knowledge encompassing everything that needs to be known. Meditation allows the deeper significance and nature of life and existence to reveal itself.

Summary

The aim of this topic is to try to show that there is far more to each of us than is commonly believed. We don't realize how much we underestimate ourselves in every way.

We have attempted to show that it is possible to contact the deeper aspects of mind and find out about ourselves through meditation. Most of us spend our lives totally extroverted failing to realize that an ocean of bliss and knowledge exists within each of us, merely waiting to be discovered. It is always there and we are always in contact with these deeper aspects, but we don't know it. Our level of awareness is insufficient. The method to be aware and know this intimate link is meditation.

We have also tried to convey that meditation does not require you to change your present living habits in any drastic manner. All you need to do is to practise yoga with sincerity, regularity and aspiration.

One thing that we have not emphasized is that without effort nothing will be gained. Practice is essential.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

Hasta Mudras: Hand Positions for Meditation

The position of the hands while practising a meditation technique is important. At first it may seem to be an insignificant aspect of meditative practice, yet it has been found by the rishis and yogis throughout the ages and by people today that the wrong position of the hands can severely curtail successful meditative practice. This is particularly the case with beginners, but as one starts to master the mind and body, the position of the hands will have little influence.

However, in this book we are concerned with aspirants who have yet to know the experience of meditation, therefore we emphasize the necessity of placing the hands in a suitable position.

There are large numbers of hand positions called *hasta mudras*. We don't intend to describe them all for this is unnecessary; we will merely concern ourselves with a few which have been found to be applicable and helpful for meditation practices.

JNANA MUDRA (PSYCHIC GESTURE OF KNOWLEDGE)

The Sanskrit word *jnana* means 'intuitive knowledge' and the word *mudra*, for the purpose of this discussion, means 'attitude'; thus this hand position is known as the 'attitude of intuitive knowledge'.

Technique

Sit in any meditative asana.

Fold the index fingers of both hands so that the tips touch the inside root of their corresponding thumbs.

Straighten the other 3 fingers and separate them slightly.

Place the hands on the knees, with the palms downwards.

The 3 unbent fingers and the thumb of each hand should point downwards towards the floor in front of the knees.



Relax your arms and hands.
Now prepare yourself for meditation practice.

Alternative

Jnana mudra is often performed with the tip of the thumb and the index finger in touch with each other. In other words, the thumb and the index finger form a circle. This variation is equally as good as the basic position we have just described.

Symbolic significance

This mudra is not only very comfortable for meditative practices, it also has various symbolic meanings. The following is the most common: the straight fingers, small, ring and middle, represent the three categories of nature. That is, nature is divided into three arbitrary aspects: *tamas* (inertia, laziness, darkness, ignorance, etc.), *rajas* (action, passion, movement) and *sattwa* (understanding, purity).

These three states have to be transcended one after the other, in order to pass from darkness into light and from ignorance to knowledge. The bent index finger represents the individual manifestation of consciousness (*jivatma*).

The thumb symbolizes the all pervading consciousness or reality. The individual (index finger) is bowing down to supreme consciousness (thumb) and acknowledging its unsurpassed power. Yet at the same time the index finger and the thumb touch each other, which shows that though they seem separate, in fact the individual being is one with the supreme. It symbolizes yoga at its culmination.

CHIN MUDRA (PSYCHIC GESTURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *chin* means 'consciousness'; therefore this hand position can be translated as the 'attitude of consciousness'.

Description

This mudra is very similar to jnana mudra. Again the tip of the index finger can be either placed at the root of the thumb or so that the tip of the index finger is in contact with the tip of the thumb.

The difference lies in the arrangement of the hands on the knees. During chin mudra the hands are placed so that the palms face upwards with the backs of the hands resting on the knees. The unbent fingers should also point forwards away from the body. The symbolic meaning is the same as jnana mudra.

CHINMAYA MUDRA (GESTURE OF MANIFESTED CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *chinmaya* means 'manifested consciousness'; in other words, the phenomenal world around us that has arisen from the underlying consciousness.

Technique

Hold the fingers in the same way as depicted for jnana mudra.

Fold the 3 straightened fingers so that the tips touch or point towards the palm. The position of the thumb and index finger remains the same, whether the tips are in contact or if the tip of the index finger presses the root of the thumb. Both are correct.

Place the hands on the knees, palms upwards or downwards.

Symbolic significance

The four folded fingers represent the finite aspects of the world around us. The closed fist shows that the phenomenal world seems to be severely limited, blind and unconscious. The thumb pointing forwards indicates the consciousness and the transcendental aspect of existence that pervades everything. It is often regarded as different to or separate from the material world, yet in fact the manifested universe is really identical with and permeated with consciousness. The material world is

linked intimately with consciousness. This is indicated by the contact between the index finger and the thumb.

Furthermore, the folded fingers represent the physical, bioplasmic and mental aspects of life. These are not the complete aspects of man, for there is also consciousness. All of these aspects are intimately linked, yet it is the consciousness that is transcendental and capable of contacting infinity and the whole. This is indicated by the thumb, which points away from the finitude symbolized by the four fingers.

Again this mudra symbolizes yoga – the realization that the individual (four fingers) is identical to and connected directly with consciousness. The four fingers can also represent the gradual unfoldment of higher states of awareness. That is, the little, ring and middle fingers represent different facets of the material world, from stones and trees to animals and birds, all becoming increasingly aware. Eventually there is man, who seems to be no more than mind and body yet as far as we know, man alone can develop awareness sufficiently to know his integral identity with consciousness. This again is shown by the joining of the thumb and index finger.

General comments

There are many other hand mudras. Many ancient yogis and sages are depicted while displaying a characteristic mudra. These mudras have symbolic meaning, neuropsychic implications, and they also have the power to evoke forces within the individual. In other words, the individual dwells on and tries to experience the indescribable meaning contained within a mudra. In this way it is possible to call up inner forces which otherwise lie hidden and dormant. This is why mudras are so powerful.

Neuropsychic influences

If the reader has read the chapter on prana he will appreciate the significance of the bioplasmic or pranic body¹. Though we cannot normally detect this more subtle aspect of our being, prana is nevertheless continually flowing within the physical body.

Some of this prana is discharged from the tips of the fingers. The hand mudras are methods of redirecting the prana or

bioplasmic energy inwards; that is, the fingers and the hands in contact with the knees close some of these circuits. The prana is kept within the body instead of being lost.

Performance with meditative asanas

These hand mudras should be done in conjunction with meditative asanas². Choose any mudra.

In the meditative asanas such as vajrasana and veerasana, the mudras can still be practised. However, in the case of vajrasana the hands will be placed on the upper part of the thighs instead of the knees, and in veerasana the hands have to be placed either one on top of the other or on the feet.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 3)

So far in the first two stages of nadi shodhana pranayama we have described alternate manipulation and control of breath through the two nostrils¹. In other words, the aim has been to direct the flow of breath through each of the nostrils separately. There are various good reasons for these practices. Firstly, the ability to control inhalation and exhalation is increased and the breathing rate is decreased at will. From this comes improved respiration, which results in more vitality and better health, as well as greater calmness in daily life situations. Remember that the breathing rate is directly related to emotions. In general, fast unrhythmical breathing is associated with anxiety, anger and other debilitating, negative emotions, while slow, rhythmical breathing is connected with relaxation, friendship, well being and other positive emotions. Practice of stages 1 and 2 nadi shodhana pranayama can help to bring about a more harmonious attitude and way of life.

There are other important benefits obtainable from the first two stages of nadi shodhana. As previously explained the breathing process is intimately linked with the flow of prana within the pranic body². The alternate breathing helps to unblock the channels through which this prana flows. Furthermore, the flow of prana through ida (moon) nadi and pingala (sun) nadi is balanced. These two channels play a large part in determining whether one thinks, on the one hand, or performs externally orientated activities; that is, whether one is extroverted or introverted. For good health it is essential that there is a reasonably equal balance between these two opposite modes of being during the day and nadi shodhana stages 1 and 2 help to bring this about¹.

Another important benefit of balancing the flows of breath in the two nostrils is that the ida and pingala flows are simultaneously equalized. This leads to peace of mind, a rare occurrence in the modern world. Furthermore,

this condition of balance is conducive to the spontaneous occurrence of meditation.

Nadi shodhana stages 1 and 2 are also essential to prepare the lungs and the nervous system for the next stage, namely breath retention. Without developing the ability to breathe slowly and with control, breath retention in the way practised in pranayama is impossible. It is easy to hold the breath once, but to hold the breath a number of times successively with intermittent inhalations and exhalations requires practice. This is one of the functions of the practice of nadi shodhana so far introduced: to accustom the body for the higher practices involving breath retention.

NADI SHODHANA STAGE 3 – ANTAR KUMBHAKA

The inner retention of breath is called many names in Sanskrit: it is known as antar, antaranga, abhyantara or poorna kumbhaka. We will adopt the name *antar kumbhaka*, where the word *antar* means 'inner' and *kumbhaka* means 'breath retention'. In other words, antar kumbhaka is the practice where the breath is held inside the lungs.

Antar kumbhaka has a marked influence on the flow of prana throughout the pranic body. Since there is a close relationship between the pranic body and mind, antar kumbhaka in turn allows one to gain some control over the mind. Unfortunately, most people have a mind that is in a continual state of disturbance and fluctuation. Antar kumbhaka slows down the tumultuous mind and transforms it into a state of peaceful one-pointedness, a prerequisite for the state of meditation.

Scriptural references

Kumbhaka is widely mentioned in the ancient yogic texts for it is a very important practice. The ancient text called the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* in particular, discusses it at great length.

The following are a few extracted quotations: "He who can do kumbhaka for some time will increase digestive fire and hear the internal cosmic sound (nada). The body will become purified and free of disease."

"During kumbhaka the mind becomes steady and one experiences timelessness. One is able to concentrate intensely on the trikuti (the eyebrow centre)."

The last statement especially indicates the importance of kumbhaka as a premeditation technique. By doing kumbhaka one's concentration is automatically intensified.

The text emphasizes and warns people who practise kumbhaka to be careful: "A ringmaster tames a wild animal slowly and systematically. In the same way, one should gradually tame the prana in the body through the practice of kumbhaka. If one tries to break in and master a wild tiger or elephant too quickly without sufficient care, one can easily be injured. Similarly, if you try to control the prana in the body too rapidly and forcefully then this will also cause harm."

We also endorse the warning and will discuss this point subsequently.

There are many other ancient texts that give useful information on the subject of kumbhaka. However, since we will fully discuss the subject ourselves and in our own words we see little point in quoting them for this will only lead to needless repetition. One point worth noting, however, is that the classical raja yoga scripture called the *Yoga Sutras* defines *pranayama* as no more than kumbhaka. It says: "... pranayama is the cessation of inhalation and exhalation."

This is a very limited definition of pranayama and disagrees with the definition given by various other texts; for example the *Gheranda Samhita* gives various different practices of pranayama, including kumbhaka as one of them. However, the limited definition of pranayama as kumbhaka by the author of *Yoga Sutras*, Rishi Patanjali, does show the great importance of this seemingly simple technique.

Preliminaries

Take a comfortable sitting position. If you have been practicing the first two stages of nadi shodhana pranayama for a reasonable period of time and feel that you have comfortably mastered them, then you can disregard

stage 1¹. On the other hand, if you have not been practicing regularly over a period of some months then practise stage 1 first for some minutes. The practitioner must use his discretion in this respect and determine his own capabilities.

Practise nadi shodhana stage 2 until you establish a harmonious and relaxed breathing rate where the exhalation is twice as long as inhalation. This should be continued for a minimum of a few minutes.

Technique

After completing the preliminaries begin stage 3 as follows:

Breathe in slowly through the left nostril keeping the right nostril closed.

The duration of inhalation should be the same duration of inhalation reached at the end of stage 2.

At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils and retain the air in the lungs.

If you wish you can slightly contract the glottis to imprison and firmly hold the air within the lungs.

Hold your breath (kumbhaka) for a short duration without incurring the slightest strain or discomfort.

Then breathe in slightly through the right nostril and then slowly breathe out through the right nostril. This slight inhalation at the end of inner retention (antar kumbhaka) helps to bring the respiratory muscles back into action again and releases the locked condition of the glottis.

The exhalation should not be in one gasp but must be controlled, the duration being twice that of inhalation (i.e. the same as the duration achieved at the end of stage 2).

At the end of exhalation, breathe in through the right nostril, keeping the left nostril closed. The duration should be the same as the previous inhalation through the left nostril. Then again do antar kumbhaka for a short, comfortable length of time.

Breathe in slightly through the left nostril and then breathe out through the same nostril.

The exhalation should be twice that of inhalation.

The end of exhalation through the left nostril terminates 1 round.

Breathe in through the left nostril to start the second round.

Continue in this manner for as long as time permits and for as long as you feel comfortable.

Timing ratio

The ratio duration of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation is important and changes as one progressively develops the ability to hold the breath for longer periods of time. For the initial stages of practice keep the duration of inhalation and exhalation the same as practised in stage 2, maintaining the 1:2 ratio. During this time slowly increase the time of antar kumbhaka, starting with a few seconds and increasing by a second every few days according to circumstances. Don't progress too quickly or hold the breath for a long period in the beginning for this will gain nothing in the long run. If you perform a mighty retention in the first round, for example, it is more than likely that you will start gasping for air in subsequent rounds and will not be able to maintain the same long kumbhaka. Progress slowly but surely.

As a rough guide you should aim during this stage of practice to increase the period of antar kumbhaka so that it is the same as the period for exhalation. In other words, if for example you exhale for a count of ten, then over a period of time, whether weeks or a month, try to reach such a stage that the kumbhaka also takes a count of ten.

Thus at the end of this stage try to make the ratio of duration of one round as follows: Inhalation – 1: antar kumbhaka – 2: exhalation – 2: inhalation – 1: antar kumbhaka – 2: exhalation – 2. That is, 1:2:2:1:2:2.

Some people will find it easy to attain this ratio; others will require more time. Whatever the case, don't rush, for there is plenty of time. Those who find it easy to reach this ratio should start to increase the duration of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation, keeping the ratio fixed. Other people should persevere with their practice taking as long as is necessary to master it.

Awareness

We emphasize again that awareness of breath and mental counting is essential. This is necessary to relax the mind by withdrawing it from its normal rut of problems and to make it one-pointed. At the same time awareness of counting is vital in order to keep track of the

ratio of inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation and to alter it where necessary.

Precautions

Though antar kumbhaka is a seemingly simple and straightforward practice, it does have vast repercussions on the body and mind. You must be alert to any adverse reactions. These can take a variety of forms from excessive spots on the skin to the inability to sleep. In the first case the kumbhaka is rapidly purging the body of inherent impurities; because of the rapidity, the poisons are causing numerous spots to erupt on the skin as they are expelled. In this case reduce or even stop the practice of kumbhaka for a short time to allow the body to cleanse itself more slowly. In the second case, kumbhaka is in a sense overcharging your body and mind above its normal level of activity. Reduce or stop your practise for some time. There are many other possible adverse reactions that can occur. Be alert to them and if you need advice seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher.

The usual reason for any kind of adverse reaction is generally too much practice in the early stages. Be moderate in the time you spend daily doing pranayama, especially kumbhaka. For the first six months you should do no more than 10 minutes. If you want to do more and your constitution is adequate then probably you can with great benefit. If you are not sure about your practice then once again we advise you to consult someone with experience.

We emphasize that the duration of antar kumbhaka should be slowly increased without any strain, so that the body mechanisms are slowly accustomed to the new level of functioning. If you have not practised stages 1 and 2 of nadi shodhana pranayama we strongly recommend that you do them for a month or so before you attempt serious practice of antar kumbhaka.

Sequence

In accordance with other forms of pranayama the best time to practise is after asanas and immediately prior to meditation practice.

Benefits

A large percentage of diseases are caused by disruptions and disturbances within the pranic

body and mind. Nadi shodhana pranayama, especially when it incorporates antar kumbhaka, is a powerful and direct method of bringing about harmony into these areas. As such when one approaches antar kumbhaka practice sensibly and avoids adverse reactions, it can have a wonderful influence on preventing and removing a wide variety of diseases. It is especially effective in tackling the more obvious psychosomatic disorders such as asthma, diabetes, etc. for it results in stillness and peace of mind.

The practice of antar kumbhaka is excellent for the mind. It is a great aid in introducing clear thought and concentration. We therefore highly recommend kumbhaka for those who are engaged in a lot of mental work and who require mental and physical vitality.

Pranayama, especially kumbhaka, helps to eradicate impurities from the body. This is clearly stated in the quotation that we have already given from *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. Our body is continually throwing out impurities from itself. Because of bad eating habits, emotional stress, inefficiency of internal organs, etc., the purification process becomes inadequate. This results in the accumulation of waste products and in disease of one form or another. Pranayama, especially kumbhaka, aids this purification process and thereby is a great help in attaining the best possible health. So swift is this purification that occasionally the body manifests sores etc. to cope with the extra elimination of poisons. This is partly the reason for the so-called adverse reactions of this type.

Notes

¹ Nadi Shodhana: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 3; Book I; Lesson 4; Topic 3

Mudras: Agochari Mudra

In this lesson we will describe stage 1 of the meditation method of *trataka*¹. The mudra that we will shortly describe, agochari mudra, is an excellent form of *trataka*. It is for this reason that we have introduced it at this stage in the book. Furthermore, this mudra is an important and integral part of *kriya yoga*, therefore it should be practised and perfected before undertaking some of the *kriya yoga* techniques.

At first agochari mudra will seem a little strange and difficult, for it requires a fixed gaze at the nose tip. The eyes have to assume a position to which they are normally unaccustomed. But with practice the eye muscles will adapt themselves to their new role, strengthening the eyes and in turn improving the eyesight. Agochari mudra, if practised for some time with awareness, can induce high states of concentration and tranquillity of mind.

AGOCHARI MUDRA (NOSE TIP GAZING)

The word *agochari* literally means 'unknown', so it is possible to call this mudra the unknown mudra. However, in this context agochari comes from the Sanskrit word *agocharam*, which implies something that is beyond sense cognizance. In other words, this mudra is a mudra that allows one to transcend or go beyond normal awareness.

Another name for this mudra is *nasikagra drishti*. The word *nasikagra* means 'nose tip' and *drishti* means 'to gaze'. Therefore, this alternative when translated gives an exact description of the technique, namely 'nose tip gazing'.

It is worthwhile pointing out that this mudra is one of the oldest recorded yogic practices. It is depicted in the ancient ruins of Mohanjodaro, which was a flourishing society many thousands of years ago, even before the Vedas were recorded. The great archaeologist Sir John Marshall, who did much exploration of

this ancient site, says the following: "It (the statue) represents someone seemingly in the pose of a yogi . . . the eyelids are more than half closed and the eyes are looking downwards to the tip of the nose." So the ancient sculptor and the people of that time must have had some respect for this practice to depict it in stone for posterity.

Scriptural references

This practice is mentioned in a number of ancient yogic texts. It seems so simple and inconsequential that one might easily regard it as insignificant. But in fact if it is done for a long time with intensity it can induce high states of introspection and in turn, meditation. The sublime and inspiring *Bhagavad Gita* refers to nose tip gazing in the following *sloka* (verse): "Holding his body, head and neck erect and motionless, the aspirant should gaze at the tip of his nose without once turning around." (6:13) This verse is included in the chapter describing the method that one should adopt in order to purify and steady the mind to make it one-pointed. The *Bhagavad Gita* says that by sufficient practice and by keeping the mind in a continual state of balance and concentration one attains meditation and higher illuminative knowledge.

Technique

Sit in any comfortable meditative pose². First of all close your eyes and relax your whole body. Then open your eyes and focus on the nose tip.

Don't strain your eyes, but try to hold both eyes on the tip of the nose. If the attention of both eyes is truly directed inwards to the tip of the nose then you should see a double outline of the nose. These two outlines become one and solid where they merge with each other. The two outlines cross each other at the nose tip to form a V-shaped point. You should direct your gaze at this point. If you don't see

this V-shape then it means that your eyes are not both fixed on the nose tip. In this case adopt the method of converging the eyes outlined below.



At first you will find that you can hold your attention on the nose tip for a few seconds. Continuation of the practice becomes a little uncomfortable.

Be sure to release the position of the eyes for a few seconds and then repeat the practice. In this manner you will gradually increase the period of time of actual nose tip gazing as the eyes progressively become accustomed.

Under no circumstances should you strain the eyes. Proficiency in the practice should be developed over a period of weeks.

When you can gaze at the nose tip for a minute or so without the slightest difficulty then become aware of your breath as well as your nose tip.

Feel the breath moving to and fro through the nose.

At the same time you will hear a slight sound as the breath moves through the nasal passages; also be aware of this sound.

Try to be completely absorbed in the practice to the exclusion of all other thoughts.

Maintain awareness of the nose tip, movement of the breath and the accompanying sound.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time.

Method of converging the eyes

The biggest obstacle in the beginning is the inability to converge both eyes on the nose tip.

There is a method of overcoming this problem: hold up one finger in front of your eyes at a distance of about 45 cms.

Fix both eyes on the finger; at this distance it is easy.

Then slowly move the finger nearer and nearer to the nose, all the time keeping the eyes fixed on the finger.

Continue to slowly bring the finger closer to the nose until it touches the nose tip.

The eyes should still be focussed on the finger. Then merely transfer the attention of the eyes to the nose tip and remove the finger.

You will now find that both of the eyes converge on the nose tip.

If necessary ask a friend to tell you if this is indeed the case.

Eventually this method becomes superfluous and you will find that the eyes can be fixed on the nose tip at will.

Awareness and duration

Though the eyes are open, this practice is a method of introspection. If you are doing the practice correctly then your awareness should be only on the nose tip and the flow and sound of the breath. Under these circumstances the open eyes are not aware of the outside world. The eyes are concentrated and in turn the mind too.

This practice can be done for as long as you up to five minutes.

Time of practice

This technique needs no preparation so can be practised at any time of the day. If you wish you can even practise while sitting on a bus or a train. It is ideally practised early in the morning and late at night, especially before sleep, for it induces calmness of mind as a preparation for deep, restful sleep.

Benefits

The benefits are essentially the same as given for *trataka*¹. If your mind is in a state of disturbance and turmoil or if you feel angry then practise this technique. It is especially suitable in this respect, for it can be done at any time during the day when you are most likely to meet stressful and disruptive situations. Most other techniques require preparation and a special place of practice.

Notes

¹ Topic 6 of this lesson

² Book 1, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Meditation: Trataka (Stage 1)

All meditation practices aim initially at establishing concentration of mind as a prelude to meditation. To attain this state, various different methods are adopted. One of the most direct, simple and yet at the same time effective, is the technique of trataka. The mechanics of the practice are easy to learn and understand. It can be practised by everyone and the benefits are enormous. Even beginners, with a little effort and persistence, can gain much from it in a short period of time with some kind of noticeable experience. And most importantly it can lead directly to meditation.

In this lesson and the following two lessons we will introduce the three main stages of trataka, progressing from the simpler form to the more advanced forms¹. The word *trataka* means 'steady gazing'. The practice of trataka involves gazing at a point or object without blinking the eyes. It is a method of focussing the eyes and in turn the mind on one point to the exclusion of all others. The object can be either external to the body, in which case the practice is called *bahir trataka* (outer gazing), or the object of awareness can be internal, in which case it is called *antar trataka* (inner gazing). Through this method, all the attention and power of the mind is channelled into one continuous stream. This allows the latent potential within the mind to spontaneously arise.

Trataka as a world wide method

Trataka is described in numerous scriptures, although it is usually known by other names and varies according to traditions. In the classical hatha yoga text, *Gheranda Samhita*, it is classified as one of the shatkarmas². Because the other five practices of the shatkarmas (neti, dhauti, etc.) are concerned only with cleansing the body, trataka seems to be completely out of place – an anomaly in fact. However, it is regarded as the last of the shatkarmas and

is included in this group for a good reason, namely to act as the stepping stone between physically oriented practices and mental practices that lead to higher awareness. In a sense, trataka acts as the bridge between hatha yoga and raja yoga.

Tantra, probably the most all inclusive spiritual system ever developed and the root of yoga, uses trataka on a wide scale in its many practices, whether using symbolic diagrams, deities or objects as a focus of worship or awareness. Trataka in one form or another is used by almost every religious and spiritual system, though often heavily disguised. In Hinduism, an integral part of the religious practice is to sit in front of a picture or a statue of Krishna, Rama, Shiva, the symbol Aum and so on. Though many will regard this as a form of worship, and of course it can be if the worshipper is sincere, it is actually a form of trataka for the aim is to concentrate the mind on the external deity. From this comes mental peace and a meditative state. Furthermore, many Hindus have the ability to create at will internal visualizations of the outer objects and perform inner trataka.

In Christianity the same thing is done, though in a less obvious manner. In a church there are idols of Christ, there are candles and there is always the symbolic cross. These objects act as focal points for trataka, though of course it is not known by this name. All of these forms have a deep-rooted symbolic meaning which generally acts below the level of normal awareness. In other words, these symbols correlate with and stimulate experiences and memory that is contained in what Jung called the collective unconscious. Therefore these objects of awareness invoke experiences and knowledge of which you are normally unaware.

In Tibetan Buddhism, trataka is often done on various deities, on Buddha and various geometrical figures known as yantras or mandalas. Even Zen Buddhism uses trataka,

though possibly of a more abstract type, such as staring at a blank wall. The practice of trataka is not confined to yoga. It is universal and has been used throughout the ages as a method of transcending normal experience. Trataka is simple, yet very powerful and this is the reason why so many different systems and religions have used it in one form or another as a means for spiritual upliftment

Different methods of trataka

Trataka consists of three different modes of practice:

1. Outer (bahir) trataka only
2. Outer and inner (antar) trataka combined.
3. Inner trataka only

Outer trataka can be practised alone, though in fact it is generally combined with inner trataka for the best results. The technique that we will discuss in this lesson and the next will be a combination of both outer and inner trataka. The most effective, though more difficult technique, is inner trataka practised by itself – the third stage of trataka practice¹.

1. *Outer trataka alone:* This can be practised on almost any object, a few suggestions for which are given subsequently. Agochari mudra is an excellent form of outer trataka³. Because most people are habituated to being continuously extroverted during their lives, they find it almost impossible to close the eyes for more than a few seconds, unless they are intending to sleep. Outer trataka can be used under these circumstances. The most useful purpose of outer trataka, however, is to train the eyes so that they can gaze at an object for a long time without flickering the eyelids, so that one can gain a clear inner after-image for the purpose of inner trataka.

2. *Outer and inner trataka combined:* This is the form of trataka that we will describe in this topic and the following lesson¹. One first of all gazes at an external point or object for some time, then closes the eyes and gazes at the after-image of the same object. Again any form can be used, though a bright object is most suitable, for this imprints a clear picture on the retina of the eyes, which can be clearly seen when the eyes are closed. While the stage of outer trataka does help to concentrate the mind, the main function is to produce a clear inner-image. This after-image acts as an almost overwhelming object of attention

during inner trataka. If it is bright and clear enough it will, in a sense, fascinate your awareness so that you can be aware of nothing else. This is exactly what is required for it leads to concentration of mental forces and in turn meditation.

The method of outer and inner trataka combined is especially useful for those people who have great difficulty in creating an inner-image at will, without an external counterpart. Those people who can easily create a steady and distinct inner-image without the assistance of an outer material object can practise inner trataka alone.

3. *Inner trataka alone:* This form of trataka is most conducive to introspection and exploration of the mind, for there is no contact with the outside world as there is with the other two modes. However, the other two forms, are most suitable for general practice and especially for beginners. The reason for this is that most people have a disturbed mind that is in continual conflict and turmoil. Under these circumstances it is generally difficult to create an inner image that is sufficiently overwhelming to capture the attention of the mind. If the mind is disturbed and you practise inner trataka, you will generally find that the ever wandering mind quickly forgets the inner image and becomes sidetracked onto other thoughts. As a result you will fail to gain the most benefits from the practice. Under these conditions it is far better to practise outer trataka or outer trataka combined with inner trataka, for the clarity and more tangible nature of the outer object will be more likely to hold the attention of the mind to the exclusion of other thoughts.

You should definitely do inner trataka when you can create a clear inner image and when you feel that your mind has attained a reasonable degree of equanimity and steadiness. This state will come if you practise yoga with sincerity and enthusiasm. Inner trataka is a powerful method of developing awareness of the deeper aspects of the mind and awakening its incredible potential¹.

Choice of object of awareness

Your choice of object can be almost anything. You must decide what is suitable for yourself. However, we recommend that the object has some meaning for you. In this way, there is

more likelihood of maintaining your awareness on the object during trataka. To give you an idea, below is a list of commonly used objects⁴:

- A candle flame
- A cross
- Aum symbol
- A flower – such as a rose or lotus
- Black dot on a white sheet of paper
- The rising sun (not the midday sun)
- The moon
- A star
- Shivalingam
- Nose tip
- Eyebrow centre
- Another person's eyes
- The sky
- Water
- Ishta Devata (personal deity)
- Yin and yang symbol
- Crystal
- Yantra or mandala
- Your own shadow
- Darkness
- Picture or statuette of Buddha
- Picture or statuette of Christ
- One's eyes in a mirror

There are many more possibilities. You can choose anything as your object, but once you decide, try not to change, for this will decrease the effectiveness of trataka. In other words, if you spend time developing your awareness of one particular object and then suddenly change, then you must in fact start from the beginning again to allow your mind to assimilate the new object. The mind has to mould itself around a particular object so that it is almost automatically attracted and drawn towards it. This takes time in general and it is really a waste of effort to suddenly start moulding the mind around another object. Choose carefully and then try to stick to your decision. If you feel that you want to change after a period of time, and this is a common temptation, seek expert advice before you actually do so.

We have found a candle an excellent object for trataka, especially for beginners. The reason for this is that its brightness seems to rivet, to hold one's attention. It has an almost magnetic effect on the eyes and on one's awareness. Furthermore, it leaves a very clear after-image when one practises inner trataka. Even those people who would experience

great difficulty in mentally creating an after-image for other objects should be able with a little practice to see a clear inner picture of the candle flame. For this reason we will use a candle as the object of practice in the method of trataka we will shortly describe.

Posture

Trataka should be practised while sitting in the most comfortable, yet steady position possible. Any sitting position can be taken, even sitting in a chair. However, the preferred asanas are padmasana, siddhasana, etc., which tend automatically to hold the body in the steadiest position without effort⁵.

TRATAKA – STAGE 1

Position of object for outer trataka

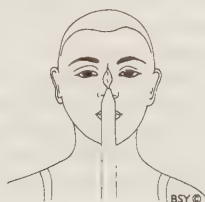
This is important to gain the most from the practice. If the object is too far away then it is more difficult to hold the attention of the mind; furthermore, it is far less likely to leave a clear and absorbing after-image during inner trataka. If the object is too low then there is a tendency to stoop forwards while sitting; this is not conducive to a steady position and also produces discomfort and backache. If the object is too high then the neck will become stiff. We have found from experience that the best position of the object is at the same horizontal level as the eyes and at an arm's length from the eyes.

Of course you can adjust the position of the object to suit your preferences; our suggestion is only a guide, though we have found that it is suitable for most people. Some people prefer the object to be at eye level but much closer to the eye. There is much to be said for this, especially if the object is small. You must experiment for yourself.

The above, needless to say, does not apply to many objects, such as the sun, the moon, the nose tip, the eyebrow centre, etc., the position of which cannot be altered for nature has already fixed it. Nevertheless, the previous general comments apply to a wide range of objects from a candle to an Aum symbol.

If you have some form of eye defect you should try to position the object so that there is no double image and no blurred outline. You must be able to see a clear shape of the object. It is best if you avoid wearing spectacles – wear

them only if necessary. For instance, if you are doing *trataka* on the moon and you are short-sighted then you will merely see a yellow blob. Under these circumstances spectacles will be necessary. However, the practice of *trataka* without glasses will help you to reduce your dependence on them, though this takes time and much practice.



Technique

The method is divided into two parts: outer *trataka* on the candle and then inner *trataka* on the after-image.

Those who wish can merely do outer *trataka*, while others can do both, one after the other. The choice is yours.

Light the candle and place it on a small bench or table so that the flame is at eye level when you sit on the floor.

Sit on the floor and adjust your position so that the candle is at an arm's length from your eyes and directly in front of you.

Adjust your position so you are comfortable with the spine erect.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Practise *kaya shthairyam*⁶.

Let your entire body become like a statue.

Make the resolve that you will not move your body throughout the whole practice; if you do then you will immediately distract your awareness away from the practice.

Preparation is important, so totally absorb yourself in your body; try to think of nothing else.

Practise *kaya shthairyam* for a few minutes.

When you are ready, open your eyes.

Gaze intently at the flame, directing your attention particularly to the top of the wick.

Don't look at anything else but the flame and wick. Try not to blink your eyelids or move your eyeballs.

Don't strain the eyes. If you must blink, then blink. With practice you will find that you will be able to gaze without blinking for a long period of time.

The important factor is that you relax your eyes as much as possible; if they are tense then try to relax them. It is tension of the eyes that causes them to flicker.

Many people try too hard not to blink, which creates tension and makes it even more difficult to control this blinking movement.

Don't try so hard and you will find that the eyes automatically cease to flicker.

Keep your awareness on the candle flame and wick.

Centre your awareness in this way so that you lose awareness of your body.

If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to the practice in hand.

Initially continue this gazing for about 2 or 3 minutes.

Then close your eyes.

Everyone has looked at the sun for some time, closed the eyes and then seen a clear impression made by the light on the retina of the eye.

Likewise, try to visualize the after-image of the candle flame in front of your closed eyes.

If you don't see an after-image don't worry; all that is required is practice; for the meantime, merely try to create and visualize the flame.

There will be a tendency for the image to move upwards or downwards; try to steady the image.

Try to be totally aware only of the after-image.

If any psychic visions, extraneous thoughts or other experiences arise, merely act as a witness.

Don't react to them in any way; just let them come and watch them with disinterest.

Continue in this manner as long as the after-image is clear.

When the image begins to fade, open your eyes and again gaze at the candle flame and wick.

Focus your awareness on the external flame, nothing else.

Continue this outer gazing for about 2 or 3 minutes, again without blinking or flickering the eyes if possible.

Then once again close the eyes and gaze at the inner image, for as long as it is sharp and distinct.

Continue to repeat inner *trataka* and outer *trataka*, one after the other for as long as you have time available.

Then just before you finish close the eyes and watch the dark space in front of your closed eyes.

Watch any activities that may occur there, taking care to remain a witness only, without any involvement.

Be aware of any thoughts that arise.

Practise this for a few minutes.

Then open your eyes and blow out the candle.

Steadiness of gaze

As we have already mentioned, it is important that one tries not to blink or flicker the eyes while doing outer *trataka*. This is necessary to produce a clear after-image for inner *trataka*. Without a steady gaze it is difficult to discern a clear inner image and this is the main reason why beginners often fail to perceive an inner image.

Furthermore, steadiness of the gaze is directly related to steadiness and concentration of mind. There is an intimate connection between these two. Great sages with a calm, peaceful mind are often distinctive for their piercing eyes, their eyes don't seem to blink very much. So in *trataka*, by steadying the eyes you are automatically relaxing and concentrating the mind.

Often people are told not to flicker or blink their eyes under any circumstances, whether they feel discomfort, whether their eyes start to water profusely or whatever. We don't agree with this practice, for it only creates tension making it even harder to comfortably keep the eyes steady. We have already pointed out that while the aim is not to move the eyes, if you must move them through discomfort, then do so. At first, beginners may find that this practice is very difficult and perhaps be able to gaze only for a few seconds before they feel the need to blink the eyes. Don't worry, with practice you will slowly develop the ability to gaze for long periods of time without the slightest movement.

The same applies to inner *trataka* on the after-image. At first the image will move due to movement of the eyeball while the eyes are closed. With practice you will be able to keep the eyes still and maintain a fixed image. Remember, the knack of mastering *trataka* lies in relaxing the eyes as much as possible.

Duration of inner and outer gazing

Continue to gaze at the flame for as long as you can without flickering the eyes. Beginners should aim at about two or three minutes. With

practice increase the time up to five and ten minutes in one stretch.

Inner gazing can be practised for as long as you can clearly see the after-image. Beginners who cannot see an image should try to create or discern an image for a minute or so and then open their eyes. Advanced practitioners may find that they can see an image almost indefinitely. In this case, practise inner *trataka* throughout the entire practice or for as long as you can see the image. The aim is to increase the duration of inner *trataka* and eventually reduce the period assigned to outer *trataka*. This is because in general, inner *trataka* is far more conducive to meditation and awareness of the deeper layers of the mind.

Duration and time of practice

To gain noticeable benefits try to practise for at least fifteen minutes every day; more if possible. You can practise at any time, though early in the morning and late at night are the ideal times. If possible practise at both these times. Arrange your program so that there are no outer disturbances.

Warning

Everyone has accumulated complexes and problems stored in the mind. The aim of yoga is to clean out the mind of this accumulated dross. *Trataka* is an excellent method in this respect for it helps you to become aware of your problems. However, it is possible for your problems to manifest too rapidly, with possible mental upsets. If you find this occurring, stop your practice and seek expert advice.

Benefits

Trataka develops the power of concentration enormously, which is of immense use in everyday life. Furthermore, the focussing of mental energy towards one point leads to peace of mind, for it stops the continually fluctuating tendency of the mind. *Trataka* is an excellent method of obtaining meditation experience and unleashing some of the dormant potential of the mind.

The power of memory is hampered in many of us by mental disturbances, which seem to cloud over our ability to recall events when we require to remember them. *Trataka* helps to improve our memory by calming the mind.

All people with nervous tension, insomnia, etc. are recommended to do trataka on a regular basis. Also those people with weak eyesight and weak eye muscles will gain much benefit from trataka.

In India, trataka is often used as a means to gain psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. But we don't recommend that you practise it for this reason, whether you believe in these powers or not, for they are a distraction on the path to higher awareness and self-knowledge.

We have described trataka using a candle flame as the object of awareness. Remember, you can use any other object of your choice, practising trataka in a similar manner.

Notes

¹ Trataka: Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6; stage 3 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

² Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

³ Topic 5 of this lesson.

⁴ For further details on the use of symbols refer to Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 1

⁵ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced some excellent new practices. We have not given any new asanas for we have already described a sufficient number to keep you busy and to cater for your practice requirement.

The hand mudras should be practised during meditation; no extra time is required. Choose the one you prefer and practise it. Try also to perfect a suitable meditation asana.

Nadi shodhana stage 3, trataka and agochari mudra are all important techniques to be included in your program. Again we repeat if you are short of time divide your routine into two separate sessions – morning and evening. By now you will have realized that for an integrated program of asanas, pranayama and meditation techniques more than half

an hour is necessary. However, not all people have this time to spare or even want to practise yoga for other than physical reasons. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this – it is your choice. However, from now onwards the half hour program will be intended for those persons who are interested primarily in maintaining good physical health and a reasonable degree of mental peace and stability.

Those people who have the time to spare and want to gain benefits beyond the physical body, in particular to clean out and explore the mind, should practise for as long as they have time available, preferably morning and evening. The other three programs, namely 1½, 1 hour and ¾ of an hour, will be orientated towards this end.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	10
Shavasana	—	4
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka	—	30
Agochari Mudra	—	10
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Ardha Titali Asana	50 each leg	3
Shroni Chakra	10 each way	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	4
Stage 3	—	8
Trataka	—	20
Agochari Mudra	—	8
		60

Program 3: duration ¾ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	8
Trataka	—	20
		45

Try to fit in Agochari Mudra, perhaps immediately before you begin Trataka.

Program 4: duration ½ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	8
Agochari Mudra	—	5
		30

Trataka is such a valuable practice that you should try to find time to practise it for at least 20 minutes on a regular basis.

Lesson 9

Once upon a time there lived a king who had a most beautiful but rampantly wild horse. The beast could not be tamed. The king decreed that he would handsomely reward anyone who could subdue his stallion. Prompted by thoughts of wealth, many people tried. Each man matched and pitted all his strength against the horse, but none was strong enough to overcome the animal by mere force. Even the mightiest were thrown off or injured. Tired and frustrated, the contestants withdrew.

Some time passed until one day the king saw the horse meekly obeying a newcomer's instructions. The king was amazed, and demanded to know how this man had succeeded where so many others had failed. The horse tamer replied: "Instead of fighting your stallion, I let him run freely to his heart's content, following his own impulses. Eventually he became fatigued and submissive. It was then no problem to befriend your horse and gain command."

It is the same with the mind. If we fight and wrestle with the mind, we will never achieve mastery over it. The method to adopt is similar to the wise horse tamer – let the mind follow its impulses and tendencies without restriction until it becomes ready and willing to accept your authority. Give the mind free rein. Don't suppress it, merely watch and get to know it.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Disorders of Digestion

Digestive ailments are extremely common throughout the world. There are very few of us who have not suffered from a stomach or abdominal problem at least once in our lives. Yoga has much to offer in preventing or removing these types of ailments. Therefore this entire topic is devoted to the most common digestive ailments and how one can gain relief through yoga practices.

Many writers insist that the digestive system is the source of nearly all other diseases. Their reasoning is that many of the diseases and minor ailments which inflict our body are caused by autopoisoning. In other words, toxins enter the body via the digestive system from bad or dirty food or because of the build-up of waste products in the bowels which are reabsorbed into the bloodstream. Actually, we don't want to delve too deeply into this subject at this stage, but we would like to point out that in our opinion it is the mind that has the largest part to play in all types of diseases. One should remember, however, that the mind and body are intimately related, so that mistreatment of one will automatically lead to repercussions on the other. That is, if one has mental conflicts then these will reflect in one way or another within the body, possibly in the digestive system. Or to put the same idea in other words: mental problems, whether small or large, tend to weaken the body; under these circumstances the body loses its natural resistance to infection, and disease can result. On the other hand, it is possible to quote various instances where disease definitely does originate from the digestive system. For example, if one accidentally eats contaminated food then it is very difficult to assign the cause to the mind. The cause clearly lies in poisoning of the digestive system. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that the digestive system would be less vulnerable to infection if it is in the best possible health. Mental conflicts detract from this. Of course

there is a limit to this resistance. If you ate half a kilogram of cyanide it is highly unlikely that you would survive even if you were totally without mental problems. This dispute has to be approached sensibly without dogmatic assertion to support either view. The mind-body complex is an integrated unit. Each affects the other. Therefore all diseases are caused by various factors which can originate within the mind or the body. It is the same with digestive ailments – they can be caused by both mental and physical reasons though more likely a combination will be nearest the truth.

Yoga can offer much in the way of removing and preventing digestive disorders. There are many yogic techniques that clean out the digestive system, such as *kunjal kriya*¹, and there are others which will be discussed later in the book². Many digestive ailments, such as ulcers and constipation, are caused mainly by nervous tension or worries. Yoga practices in general aim at calming the mind and removing the conflict. In this way, many of these types of ailments fade away through the practice of yoga. Let us briefly discuss the most common digestive ailments and how yoga can help to remove them.

Constipation

This abnormal functioning of the bowels can manifest in three distinct ways:

1. The defecation may occur with insufficient frequency
2. Stool may be insufficient in quantity
3. Stool may be abnormally hard and dry.

Any of these definitions could be classified as constipation. However, we must emphasize that each person is different, so that one healthy person empties his bowels after each meal while another will do so once a day. There are also some people who defecate only once a week yet are considered healthy.

It is popularly believed that one must have a good motion every day or be overwhelmed

by dire consequences. This is totally incorrect and has caused more constipation in itself by making people worry without reason. If you are constipated then you will know it, for the symptoms will clearly manifest; that is, mental depression, loss of appetite, dull headache, possibly nausea, foul smelling breath, thickly coated tongue and a general feeling of heaviness and discomfort in the abdomen.

Much has been written about the constipated artist who is unable to create and the constipated scientist who is unable to think. We quote the following from the book, *A Menchen Chrestomathy* by H. L. Menchen: "There has never lived a poet in the whole history of the world, ancient or modern, near or far, who ever managed to write great poetry, or even passably fair and decent poetry, at a time when he was suffering from stenosis (restriction) at any point along the thirty odd foot, via dolorosa, running from the pylorus to the sigmoid flexure (near rectum) . . . He is stumped and helpless. The more he tries, the more vividly he will be conscious of his impotence. Sweat will stand out in beads upon his brow; he will fish patiently for the elusive thought; he will try coaxing and subterfuge; he will retire to his ivory tower; he will tempt the invisible powers with black coffee, tea and alcohol and the alkaloids – but he will not write his poem or iron out his syllogism, or find his way into . . . Striving in the face of such an interior obstacle is the most cruel of enterprises – a business more nerve-wracking and exhausting than reading a newspaper or watching a bad play."

While one is constipated, it is so tempting to strain the bowels, which can easily lead to haemorrhoids, hernia, prolapse of the rectum and a number of other undesirable yet common ailments. So if you are constipated, be careful that you do not overstrain.

There are two types of constipation – colic and dyschezic. Colic constipation is caused by delay in the movement of the faeces to the rectum. This is often the result of a diet that contains little or no indigestible residue. In other words, it is necessary to eat food that contains a sufficient amount of roughage or material which the digestive system is unable to digest. It is this waste product that partly stimulates movement within the large intestine. Without this, the relevant muscles become lazy. Other intestinal ailments and

pain can also curtail the normal muscular movements (peristalsis) of the intestines. Another common cause of colic constipation is obstruction within the large intestine, which slows down the rate of movement of the faeces. This is often caused by masses of hard, dry faeces. There are various yogic practices which are of great help in this type of complaint. The most important ones are shankhaprakshalana² and basti³.

The second type of constipation, namely dyschezic, is caused by difficulty or inability to defecate completely. In other words, the rectum is always filled with faeces even immediately after defecation. This is caused either by insufficient functioning of the defecation reflex and muscles or by an obstruction in the region of the rectum. This obstruction is often a foreign object; in fact such strange things as spoons and forks and cigarette lighters have been found to be the cause of this form of constipation.

Probably the most common cause of inefficient defecation is an habitual tendency to ignore the natural urge to go to the toilet, which may be caused by lack of time or privacy and by unpleasant surroundings. Under these circumstances one should make efforts to change their habits or environment if possible. There are many other causes of constipation, but the ones we have mentioned are the most frequent.

Constipation is aggravated by fear of its consequences. Also some people if they fail to defecate strictly according to their normal routine immediately start to take steps to remedy what they think is a serious state of constipation. Both these situations encourage the excessive use of laxatives. Though the use of laxatives may be necessary they should be avoided as much as possible. Laxatives in general tend to violently empty the bowels and in the long run detract from its natural functioning. Try to use mild laxatives in preference to more drastic types, if you must use laxatives at all.

If you are or have been an habitual user of laxatives and you suddenly stop, don't expect to have the same movement that you obtained through the use of laxatives. You must almost expect no bowel movement for a few days since the bowels are totally empty; don't immediately assume that you are once more

constipated. There will be a normal movement only when the bowels are sufficiently filled.

In conclusion we can say that constipation can arise because of various factors. The most common are incorrect diet, insufficient exercise, mental and emotional upsets, inconsistent toilet habits, weak abdominal muscles and consumption of too many laxatives. Here are some suggestions which may help you prevent or remove constipation.

- Don't listen to too many so-called experts. They tend to create more problems than cures, by assuming that any slight inconsistency in your toilet habits is the sign of impending doom – the onset of chronic constipation. Many people who previously did not suffer from constipation eventually do so because they are persuaded or worried into it.
- The volume of stool and the frequency of defecation can be regulated in a more normal manner by adding cereal bran and vegetables to the diet. These foods contain cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin which stimulate intestinal movement. Furthermore, cellulose and hemicellulose are partly digested by bacteria in the colon with the formation of fatty acids. These act as natural laxatives. Prune juice is useful for it contains the natural laxative diphenylisatin.
- Drink plenty of liquids.
- Reduce your dependence on commercial laxatives as much as possible.
- Try to establish a regular bowel habit at a suitable time during the day. In the morning before breakfast is to be preferred, for this is the time when you are most likely to be relaxed physically, emotionally and mentally.
- Practise asanas every morning to help in emptying out the bowels. Many asanas are useful for constipation but the following are particularly recommended: *supta pawanmuktasana*, *utthanpadasana*, *kauva chalasana*, *surya namaskara*, *bhujangasana*, *marjariasana* and *shalabhasana*⁴. There are many more – in fact we can say that most asanas are helpful for treating constipation.
- There are various yogic practices that are specifically designed to clean out the digestive system. As such they are very useful for relieving constipation. The most important practices are *shankhaprak-*

*shalana*², *basti*³, *nauli*, *agnisar kriya* and *moola shodhana*⁵.

There are many people who have turned to yoga in order to rid themselves of constipation. Often this was as a last resort, every other method having failed. They have usually found great improvement in their condition.

The last point to remember is that chronic tension plays a vital role in constipation. One of the basic aims of yoga is to bring mental and emotional peace into one's life. As such, all practices of yoga including asanas, pranayama and meditation practices make an indirect contribution to removing constipation. Most commercial cures aim at removing the manifestation, namely physical constipation, whereas yoga aims at the root cause – mental and emotional constipation. If this more subtle form of constipation is removed, then the physical by-product will automatically disappear.

Ulcers

There are two types of ulcers that occur within the digestive system – peptic and duodenal. Peptic ulcers occur within the stomach and are most common among women. Duodenal ulcers occur within the duodenum (the first section of the intestines after the stomach) and are more common among men. Both types seem to be the consequence of our pressurized modern living.

Ulcer sufferers are a distinct group of people. They tend to bottle up their worries and problems, afraid to let other people see how they feel. Society sets high goals which most people feel they must attain to be successful in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. To achieve these ends, they continually drive themselves too hard, taking insufficient sleep, rushing here, there and everywhere. They gulp their food at odd hours. Ulcers are often the product of this situation.

The ulcer appears as a hole or defect in the lining of the stomach or duodenum. Normally, when there is food in the stomach, nerves stimulate the release of hydrochloric acid for digestion purposes. When the digestive system is working correctly little or no acid is present in the stomach when it contains no food. However with ulcer sufferers, the nervous system is unable to relax and continues to stimulate the release of digestive juices within

the stomach. The acid tends to eat away the lining of the stomach or the duodenum. This takes place over a period of months and years and results in the formation of ulcers.

The root cause of ulcers is worry and chronic stress. People are unable to relax even for short periods. The result is the continual secretion of acid in the stomach when it is not required. It is here that yoga is indispensable. The essence of yoga is relaxation. All yoga practices, from asanas to meditative techniques are intended to remove tension in all its forms, whether physical, emotional or mental. These practices allow the nervous system and consequently the digestive system to return to normal.

Furthermore, yoga creates a deeper understanding and tolerance of both oneself and others. This encourages each of us to live a more harmonious life and develop optimism and confidence. The result is that the ulcers will either heal themselves or not occur in the first place. Therefore, we can say that yoga is the way to remove both the ulcers themselves and their root cause, mental tension.

Food poisoning and digestive infections

Food poisoning results from eating food which is contaminated with certain types of bacteria. These organisms are generally of the paratyphoid group of bacteria, salmonella and less usually staphylococci. A disease known as botulism is far more serious although it does not occur very frequently. This bacteria is generally found in canned foods that have been incorrectly processed. The body gets rid of these infections by vomiting and diarrhoea. Generally, infections are cleaned out quite quickly and the body soon recovers.

To prevent food poisoning great care should be taken to ensure that the preparation of food is carried out as hygienically as possible. Food that has been cooked and left to cool for future consumption should always be well covered and kept in a cool place. This is essential because harmful bacteria tend to multiply at the highest rate in warm food. Another important point to remember is that people suffering from cuts or sores on their hands should not touch food that is to be eaten. In hot climates and during the summer more care should be taken in connection with food and water.

Yoga cleaning techniques such as kunjal kriya¹, shankhaprakshalana², etc. help to eliminate harmful bacteria that might have accumulated in the digestive tract. Furthermore, yoga practices in general will increase the body's resistance to bacteria, and so reduce the tendency of bacterial diseases to occur. This also applies to more serious diseases such as dysentery, but if these do occur one should immediately seek expert advice and treatment. Don't delay even in the slightest.

Indigestion

This is also called dyspepsia and is caused by eating too quickly or eating under continual nervous tension. In fact, the reason that people eat rapidly is generally because they are nervous and under stress. Under these conditions the food is insufficiently chewed and broken down in the mouth for normal processing by the stomach. Furthermore, the correct quantities of saliva and gastric juices are not secreted. This results in indigestion. Yoga is once more of great help. It makes one more relaxed and therefore more able to eat food slowly and with more enjoyment.

Of course, indigestion can also be caused by eating too much food, especially if the food is rich. Yoga will not help you directly to solve this problem. You must find your own solution.

Summary

We have discussed the most common types of digestive ailments. There are many others – gallstones, pancreatitis, etc. Yoga will not remove or prevent all ailments of the digestive system. For example, if you are suffering from a serious case of hernia, then a more direct remedy is necessary. Also, if you are in the middle of a cholera epidemic, again yoga will not assure you immunity, or be the best way to recovery. Yoga will greatly help, but it is not the panacea. Yet at the same time, we have found from experience that yoga is a definite help in preventing the onset of many widespread diseases and ailments, and in providing a remedy. Most diseases result directly or indirectly from mental and emotional conflicts and physical weakness or malfunction. Yoga is a powerful system for helping to resolve mental and emotional problems and make the body stronger and healthy. As such the body is more able to resist various types of diseases

(such as dysentery) and there is more likely to be cooperation between the mind and body instead of antipathy (as there is in the case of ulcers).

Generally speaking, we feel that yoga will be of use in one way or another. In fact, there are large numbers of people who, often as a last resort, have turned to yoga in order to remove some digestive complaint, and have been most surprised at the positive results they have received.

Notes

¹ Kunjal kriya – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

³ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 2

⁴ Supta pawanmuktasana – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2; utthanpadasana – Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3; kauva chalasana – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3; surya namaskara – Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2; bhujangasana – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2; marjariasana – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 4; shalabhasana – Topic 3 of this lesson

⁵ Nauli: stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3; stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2; agnisar kriya – Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2; moola shodhana – Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 1

Removal of Mental Problems (Part 1)

There is not one person who does not have some deep-rooted complex, fear, phobia or conflict. Anyone who thinks that he has no mental problems is only deluding himself and at the same time preventing his progress into higher awareness and happiness in life, for while the problems definitely exist, without acknowledging them, no steps are taken to remove them. There is absolutely no stigma attached to admitting one's mental hang-ups, though sad to say there has always been a feeling of scorn, or perhaps fear, associated with those who suffer from more obvious mental problems, such as schizophrenia and melancholia. The reason for this is not certain; perhaps we all fear the possibility that we too could easily become a mental patient. There may be a lot of truth in this, for as far as we are concerned there is not really any difference between obvious mental patients and everyone else; only that in the former, underlying problems are more intense and have consequently manifested with greater force.

The people who know that they have some deeper problems only have to remove them. This is not so easy, but not impossible and at least you have accepted that problems do exist, which is the first step. Other people who will not acknowledge their mental problems must first of all be convinced that they do in fact have them. This is the situation with most people. There is a very convincing test that will tell you whether you are as free of problems as you think you are. Ask yourself the following question: "Am I happy twenty-four hours a day, every day?" If you are not, then this indicates that you have mental problems, for if you are completely free of any mental disturbances then you would continually emanate happiness and joy like an overflowing river. This is clearly illustrated by the great yogis, sages and saints who, because they have emptied themselves of most or all of their problems, unceasingly radiate peace and joy.

The more unhappiness and dissatisfaction that you feel in your life, the more mental problems you have. Ask yourself this question and give yourself an honest answer. From your answer you can decide whether you are without mental problems or whether you do in fact have them. This doesn't mean you should not be angry or have other strong emotions, for one can still act out these emotions and also feel a sense of happiness. In fact, there are innumerable cases of great yogis and sages who have shown great anger, yet they have still maintained their feeling of joy in life. It is not the situation or the expressions you show that we are talking about; it is whether or not you feel a sense of wonder, happiness and contentment throughout your daily life. If you don't, then you have some form of mental problem. If you admit that probably you do have problems, obvious or not obvious, then you will not be alone – you will be accompanied by most of the world's population. Having admitted the possibility of underlying mental disturbances you are then ready to take steps to remove them. If you don't admit they exist, then you will probably see no need to make the effort to remove your problems. As such there is no need to read any further.

Mental problems, phobias, fears and their elimination are such an important factor in our lives that we have decided to devote a lot of space to considering this subject. We must be careful, however, for it is so easy to talk and talk in theoretical terms about causes and repercussions but fail to give any really useful practical methods for removal. As such the aim of this topic and the related discussions, in the forthcoming sections is to suggest practical methods without becoming too involved or tied down in verbal concepts¹. The aim is to give you methods and guidance so that you can take steps to remove your problems, the blocks that prevent you obtaining the most out of life. And only you can do it; this applies even

if you visit a psychiatrist; he can only stimulate and guide you to remove and manifest your own problems. So we are primarily interested in practice, not words.

Yoga and mental problems

Actually the main aim of yoga as a science is to root out the cause of mental conflicts. It is these problems that act as blocks that prevent the influx of higher awareness, as well as happiness in life. It is during periods of perfect mental balance that one has his realizations, intuitive flashes and revelations, and lives in a state of increased awareness. These higher experiences don't shine through when the mind is in a state of turmoil; and by turmoil we include the deeper levels of the subconscious mind. Many people feel relaxed on a conscious level and wonder why they don't have higher experiences. The answer is simple – while they may consciously feel relaxed, the subconscious levels are certainly not relaxed. Also, one must be alert and awake. The whole system must be tuned to a high degree of sensitivity and receptivity. Most people when they feel relaxed become sleepy and drowsy. This is not the perfect condition under which the influx of higher awareness occurs.

To live in a continual state of higher awareness, one must always remain in a relaxed and receptive state. All the conscious and subconscious problems must be eradicated. So, you see, the removal of mental problems is an essential part of yoga. If yoga failed to clean out the mind, then it would fail to give the many benefits that it does, especially in higher spheres. Of course, one would still get some physical benefits from asanas etc., but these are an elementary though very fundamental and essential part of yogic life.

Yoga realizes that one must pass through the unhappiness associated with mental conflicts etc. before one can see the rainbow on the other side. This is beautifully summed up by a Zen quotation which goes as follows:

*Under the sword raised high
Is hell making you tremble.
But walk on . . .
And there is the land of bliss.*

The meaning is obvious; no matter what terrible traumatic experiences you face in

life, there is always something beyond which now seems impossible but is more likely to be unthinkable. Some people call it joy, others bliss, still others spiritual knowledge and so many other insufficient names. So you too should walk through the haze of meaninglessness, persevere, and transcend the problems that make life, as it seems now, hell on earth. Actually, many people come to yoga because they have some deep-rooted problem that they want to remove. If they did not know that they had problems, or that something was lacking in their life, they would never have started yoga; there would be no incentive. From this initial introduction come many other things that they did not dream of, beyond their present comprehension. So, in fact, mental problems, though they may be the block to higher awareness, are also the stimulus that make people want to remove them and which eventually lead many people to spiritual life. Without some form of mental problems, no one would start to tread the yogic path. So in this sense, you can consider mental problems as a positive asset that help you to do something worthwhile in life, instead of wallowing in the mire of self-complacency, self-pity and laziness. You can look at mental problems from this point of view. But needless to say, they must be removed in order to gain happiness, meaning mental health, peace and most important of all, increased awareness in life.

There is a further point also. Most people have very little idea of the function of an ashram. Of course there are many functions, but as far as the ashram is concerned, the main purpose is to allow the inmates to clean out the mind by removing their mental problems. It doesn't empty the mind of common sense, but of the complexes, blocks, phobias and neuroses that clutter it. This further emphasizes the importance that yoga always aims to removing mental blocks. Without this concern, yoga would be a very limited system to say the least. Furthermore, while yoga aims at emptying the mind of problems, it does not at the same time try to fill the mind with new dogmas, as do various other systems. All conditioning has to be removed and certainly not replaced by new conditioning. The mind must be emptied of all problems so that it can spontaneously reflect that which is already existent, but normally unknown. There is no need to fill the

mind – only to empty it. This is the essence of yoga and all other productive mind cleaning systems.

What are mental problems?

This may seem an unnecessary heading, for most people should know what mental problems are, but in fact, most of us have very limited and perhaps naive concepts regarding the meaning and scope of mental problems.

The most basic mental problem with most people is *lack of meaning*. Psychiatrists as far back as Jung recognized this basic mental problem. Jung correctly pointed out that the main motivating force in everyone's life is the need to find meaning. This is usually covered over, however, by multitudinous activities or other conflicts in life that make people forget this problem exists. Or, perhaps, it is more true to say that most people participate in so many different activities in their daily life in order to forget that they can see no meaning in their life. Most psychoneurotic problems, as well as many physical problems, are caused by the basic fact that people attach no meaning to life. Everything seems pointless and futile and the despair results in intense negative emotions which can result in the breakdown of mental and bodily functions.

Jung recognized this, for he wrote with devastating simplicity, yet directness and insight: "When conscious life has lost its meaning and its promise, then it is as though a panic breaks loose . . ." This sums up the state of most people's life. They are living an empty, meaningless life, without hope. So if you are in this position, then you have a mental problem, the most basic one that a human being can have. If the sense of meaninglessness is sufficiently overpowering, then you will take steps to resolve it. And there is meaning in life, in the life of each and every one of us, but you must find it out for yourself. If you forget the present emptiness in your life, then you are escaping; if you try to cloud the question over with dogmatic assertions that there is meaning without really knowing it from the depths of your being, then you are still escaping. You must find out for yourself, through your own experience. The method is yoga. From this will come knowledge and understanding of your real nature and your incredible relationship with existence. The problem of lack of

meaning in life will automatically drop away and dissolve as you experience higher awareness and knowledge.

When you attain higher knowledge, then you can bear anything in life. You will be able to swim through the ups and downs of life with perfect ease.

There are many other more obvious mental problems, some of which you will be conscious of and others that you will not be able to recognize, for they will lie in the deeper levels of the subconscious mind. Some people are scared of insects, of certain animals, of open spaces, of closed spaces, of other people, of the opposite sex, of the dark and so on; the list is without end. Some people have sexual complexes, such as impotence; other people have a strong hatred of their mother or father, or both; others have strong feelings of jealousy towards others either specifically or generally; others have had and still feel the shock of death, perhaps of a close friend or relative. Examples can be quoted to completely fill this section. All of these problems must be rooted out if you want to achieve happiness in life.

There are some people who become neurotic because they feel that they are normal, or rather ordinary if compared to other people. There are also those who feel that they are above normal in ability and become neurotic because they are not like other people. Actually everyone has incredible potential; we are all potential geniuses. Therefore the real difference between a so-called normal person and a so-called talented person, is that the latter has used more of his inner potential. Nothing more. Therefore, please don't worry if you feel that you are only normal or perhaps abnormal, for we all have remarkable dormant ability; some merely manifest it more than others.

Some people say that inferiority is an integral part of man's nature. We strongly reject this, for there are many great yogis and sages who certainly don't feel the slightest inferiority; nor at the same time do they go to the other extreme and become superior in their attitude towards others. The feeling of inferiority is an emotional imbalance, which is caused by a lack of understanding of one's real nature. It results in excessive envy and competition in order for the individual to reduce the feeling of inadequacy when compared to others.

Though normally not recognized as a mental problem, we would also classify conditioning as a mental problem. In other words, those people (in fact everyone to a great degree, some more than others) who are attached to dogmas and fixed concepts, have a mental problem. Pride in one's country, skin colour, status, religious beliefs and intellectual ability are all mental problems in that people are fixed in their ideas. The mind has ceased to be a reservoir of spontaneous ideas; instead, it is a repository of fixed, rigid and stereotyped thought patterns. This is a major block and an obstacle to higher awareness. In other words, conditioning is a mental problem. Also included in this category is the tendency to accept ideas without reflection and personal experience. Many people believe almost implicitly everything that they read or hear, without ever relating it to their own experience. Believe nothing until you have tested it for yourself. This also applies to the contents of this book. Consider the opinions and ideas given, but only accept them when you have found them to be valid through personal experience. Only know and believe that the water is salty when you have tasted it. In fact, we consider blind susceptibility to ideas and attachment to already accumulated ideas as being a major mental problem. One should certainly be receptive, but not blindly naive.

There are many other problems, too many to discuss here. The reader will know some of these. They will have to be removed systematically. Most problems, however, will lie below the level of normal perception, in the subconscious. All you will know is that these cause unhappiness, depression, etc. In life without really knowing the reason or the source. These must be recognized and then eliminated. One thing we must emphasize is that all mental problems and blocks can be removed; they need not remain a permanent part of your character. All that is required is the need and effort to remove them.

Practical rationale

To bring about mental peace in your life, there must be a three-pronged approach:

First of all, one must try to prevent the occurrence of new problems and disturbances. It is no use whatsoever to empty the mind of existing complexes etc. and still leave it open and susceptible to new adverse impressions.

It is necessary to make the mind stronger and more resilient to the ups and downs of life.

Secondly, one must exhaust conscious problems; that is, the problems which you already know and recognize.

Thirdly, one must slowly discover and eradicate the subconscious problems. These are problems that cause you much pain, unhappiness and anguish in life, but which are buried deep in the unexplored realms of the mind. You feel the result of these problems in the form of depression etc. but you don't really know what the cause is. You may attribute the cause to some outside event or person, but the real cause lies deep in your mind. These subconscious problems must be recognized and then thrown out.

These three processes do not occur one after the other, as we have listed, but will take place simultaneously. They will supplement each other. For example, once subconscious problems are recognized (category 3) then they will of course automatically become category 2. Furthermore, as one progressively throws out mental problems, then one's ability to face life situations without being disturbed will automatically be enhanced. In other words, the less mental problems a person has, the more he or she is able to face life with calmness and equanimity. So these three categories are bound together as an integral approach in eliminating and preventing mental disturbances and gaining peace. They should operate simultaneously; we have only separated them for convenience in explanation.

These three categories will be discussed in this topic and later lessons also¹. In this topic we will discuss simple yet effective methods of bringing about more harmony and peace into one's life on a conscious level. These methods are in fact rather obvious and a matter of common sense, yet they are rarely applied. It is for this reason that we feel it necessary to discuss them. Removal of subconscious problems is of course the most important task, but resolving them on a conscious plane is also of prime importance. In fact, this is the first step to resolving one's deeper conflicts.

Self-acceptance

Try to accept yourself and your feelings; don't compare yourself with others; use your

particular talents and do what comes naturally; don't suppress emotions but act them out with awareness; try not to feel guilty about past events.

Almost everyone finds it difficult, if not impossible, to accept himself or herself. The mind is tormented by guilt, feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. One is unable to forget past events and feels dissatisfied with his role in life, all the time wishing for something more, with higher status, which will bring greater respect from other people. There is nothing wrong with ambition to succeed; it is a natural part of human nature but one should try to accept oneself, one's fallibilities and limitations. At the same time, some dissatisfaction is necessary, for this is the driving force that prompts each person to seek and aspire to higher levels of awareness. But you must be realistic in the assessment of your shortcomings.

People always compare themselves with others. They possibly feel inferior because they don't have what other people possess. They see a rich neighbour with three cars and television sets in every room of his palatial mansion and feel overwhelming envy. They compare and condemn themselves for not being equally prosperous.

Other people look at famous movie stars, wishing that they also had the talent to be so successful and popular. This comparison results in dissatisfaction and general unhappiness. People refuse to accept themselves and their limitations. They fail to realize that though the neighbour and actor outwardly display success, the less desirable aspects of their lives are likely to be hidden or disguised. Though the neighbour and actor may radiate success on a material level, they may be totally unhappy and depressed on a personal level. From a distance, and as outsiders, other people only see success and happiness; and it is with this superficial exterior that most people compare themselves. It is from this external display that most of us develop outer feelings of inadequacy and inferiority in relation to others. Try to accept yourself and not condemn yourself on the basis of unjustified comparison with others.

We all have specific talents, but with some people these attributes are more obvious. Furthermore, society at different times places

more values on some talents than others. If you are a good football player, or a good musician or speaker, then this is easily recognizable by other people and society in general. But, if you are able to work with children and inspire them, or to create a beautiful garden, or repair a car, or if you are a good parent, or able to understand the problems of others with compassion, then these qualities are still talents. They are less obvious talents at first glance, but nevertheless they are as substantial as any other. Therefore, try to realize that it is not only those who gain fame who have talent. You also have talent, perhaps less tangible, such as understanding and kindness, or the ability to be a good homemaker, but these are not so rapidly accepted as talents.

Try to do the work that suits your nature. Don't worry about what other people do, for they must also follow the dictates of their particular personalities. In recent times much status and respect is given to people who perform certain roles in life – actors, executives, academics, etc. For this reason, many people try to succeed in one of these desirable, high status spheres, even when the personality is unsuitable. This leads to unhappiness. Accept yourself and do that which comes naturally according to your personality. Do those things which come spontaneously, without excessive effort and which suit your temperament. In yoga, this is called *dharma*, and is regarded as an essential part of everyone's path to happiness and higher awareness. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the subject of *dharma*, one's natural duty, is discussed over and over again. Ignore status, for this is a social concept with little basis. A person's occupation does not matter, it is one's attitude that is important. A road sweeper who does his work with interest and awareness is further along the yogic path than a scientist who does his work half-heartedly and without awareness. Don't worry too much about what other people think. Remember, they are judging you from a viewpoint limited by their own prejudices and mental problems. Try to perform your *dharma*, work, actions, play or any other activity in accordance with your personality².

Learn to accept your feelings and emotions without guilt. If, for example, you have a tendency to become angry at the slightest provocation, accept that this is part of your

personality. Don't feel guilty. But next time you are angry try to be aware and witness your anger. Don't suppress anger, for this will only accumulate in your subconscious mind and eventually manifest as mental or physical illness. Don't be afraid to express your emotions, but at the same time maintain awareness of them. This applies to all emotions, not only anger. Of course, it is not always socially convenient to express these emotions (perhaps against one's employer), but as one progressively cleans out the mind through yoga, the emotions become more positive and cause less friction with others. There will be no need to suppress emotions under any circumstances for they will cease to exist in a negative sense.

Many people find it difficult to accept the basic human drives that are part of our makeup. We have sexual drives, food desires and so on. Many people develop complexes about these drives and feel that these urges or instincts are dirty or animalistic, usually after having been convinced of this by people whom they respect, but who have their own mental problems. Try to accept your drives as being a natural facet of human life. Recognize that they are not totally separate from, or antagonistic to life. The more you accept your drives the less you will be bothered or disturbed by them.

Try not to feel guilty about past events. Many people are continually overwhelmed by feelings of regret and guilt for past actions and experiences. Forget the past – it is finished. Live in the present. That which has happened is finished, so why worry about it? Use it only as a reference. Shakespeare with such simplicity yet depth of understanding summed up this attitude when he said: "What's gone and what's past, should be past grief." This also applies to mistreatment that you have received. If you feel continual resentment, then this is a disturbing factor which makes your life unhappy and tension-ridden. Try to drop this resentment – let bygones be bygones. If you don't, then it will continue to disrupt your life and the lives of those around you. Although this may seem easier said than done, at least consider dropping these grudges. If past resentments have taken a hold on your life and are deeply imprinted on your memory, then of course they are more difficult to remove. But they can, and will be removed if you persevere

with meditation practices. It is only a matter of time. This conscious consideration of your grudges is the first step.

Practise the suggestions that we have given, and you are on the path to total self-acceptance. At first it may be on a superficial level, but this is the beginning of self-acceptance in a much deeper sense. Automatically, you will find that as you come to accept yourself, you will start to accept others, regardless of their faults. You will begin to realize that most people act in the way they do only in order to be acceptable and worthwhile both to themselves and others. This applies to people who behave in the most bizarre manner; though their actions seem totally unrealistic, it is merely their way, however inadequate and strange, of coming to terms with themselves and their surroundings. Increasingly you will realize this and learn to accept others for what they are, and this will help others to accept you. This increased awareness is a positive approach to bringing about harmony in your life, both in the internal and external worlds.

Total self-acceptance comes with the advent of higher knowledge and understanding. It is possible to totally accept one's personality without the slightest qualification or reservation. When one lives in a state of meditation it is impossible not to accept oneself and others. But to attain this experience, and to continually live it, you must make a positive attempt now. The first step is to apply consciously what we have just discussed. This should be supplemented by meditation and other yoga practices, which we will discuss in the following lesson¹. In this way, one will gradually eradicate mental problems and become more tolerant of oneself and others.

Relaxation

Mental problems can only be confronted and removed when the mind is relaxed. Relaxation can be induced by:

- Regular practise of relaxation techniques such as shavasana³
- Reorientation of one's attitude using the codes as previously outlined⁴
- Progressive removal of mental problems (this is a cyclic process, for a mind with fewer problems is able to relax more deeply, and in turn throw out more accumulated deep rooted problems).

As the mind is emptied of its ingrained problems, one automatically becomes more relaxed in all life situations. Conversely, the cultivation and inducement of relaxation by various techniques helps to both clean out the accumulated dross and prevent further problems arising and causing new disturbances. Relaxation techniques are therefore highly recommended for rooting out mental problems. This is not only practised by yoga but also by other systems concerned with the mind. Psychiatry, for example, clearly recognizes the importance of relaxation; this is why good therapists either systematically relax the patient with a special technique, or induce relaxation through the atmosphere of their room and by being relaxed themselves. Relaxation is absolutely necessary if you wish to empty your mind.

The subject of relaxation has been fully discussed already and you are strongly advised to refer back to the relevant lessons³. Both topics should be carefully read for they relate very closely to the removal of mental problems. We described those techniques for inducing short-term relaxation, such as shavasana, which can be performed within a few minutes³. One will almost immediately feel the beneficial effects. These methods are really no more than forms of meditation practices, and therefore can be used for diving into the mind and disposing of its problems¹.

We also suggested that you adopt a ten-point code to help bring about a more permanent state of relaxation in life⁴. Although this code is in some ways superficial and artificial, it is designed to reduce the continual conflict and friction that most people experience with their surroundings and others. With practice and time the significance of the code will penetrate the subconscious mind and help to reorientate your attitudes to life. Most people are always tense and because of this they cannot hope to resolve their problems. This code will induce more relaxation and allow you to treat life as a psychiatrist's couch, where you progressively exhaust your inner conflicts.

We would also like to remind you that relaxation is essential in order to explore the mind and confront your problems. Without relaxation this is impossible, and because most people are continually tense they can never, under normal circumstances, come face to

face with their deeper conflicts. A reasonable degree of relaxation, even for half an hour, is a necessary prelude to recognizing your problems. So relaxation, brought about by any method is of prime importance.

Finally, we should like to emphasize that deep states of relaxation for long periods of time, whether during eating, sleeping, working or whatever, can only come when the mind is reasonably clear of problems. The more one empties the mind the more one is able to relax under all conditions and tribulations. Moreover, the more lasting and deeper the relaxation, the easier it is to clean the mind. They go together like the sun and the moon. Relaxation leads to a less troubled mind, and a less troubled mind leads to greater relaxation. It is a circular relationship. But this relationship must be initiated some time, if you want to experience positive and wonderful changes in your life.

Summary

We have not outlined definite techniques in this topic, for we feel that consideration of the headings described, namely 'Self-acceptance' and 'Relaxation' requires time. Moreover, putting them into practice in daily life on a conscious level and with sincerity also takes time. Although we have already discussed relaxation it is more than likely that you have not had the opportunity to put the techniques we gave into practice³. This applies particularly to the ten-point code. For this reason, we suggest that you spend some time in thinking or rethinking about the code and apply it in your life⁴.

In the following two lessons, we will discuss more tangible methods of identifying and exhausting mental problems, both conscious and subconscious¹.

Notes

¹ Removal of Mental Problems: Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2; Part 3 – Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 1

² For further details on the subject of dharma refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 7

Asanas: Practice

The two asanas that we will subsequently describe are excellent asanas for improving the health and strength of the lower back. They are called *shalabhasana* (locust pose) and *ardha shalabhasana* (half locust pose). Many beginners may find *shalabhasana* a little difficult at first because it requires contraction of the lower back muscles, a function that is rarely used in day to day activities. If you find *shalabhasana* too difficult, or even impossible, you should perform *ardha shalabhasana* instead. This is a far easier asana and will prepare your back muscles for eventual mastery of *shalabhasana*.

SHALABHASANA (LOCUST POSE)

This asana is so called because the legs are raised in the final position to imitate the tail of a locust. It is also commonly known as the grasshopper pose for the same reason. It is an excellent backward bending asana which has a specific influence on the organs, muscles and nerves of the pelvis, abdomen and chest. It is also particularly noteworthy for the fact that it is one of the few asanas that gives a direct massage to the heart.

Shalabhasana complements *bhujangasana* (cobra pose), for *bhujangasana* exercises the top part of the body, while *shalabhasana* correspondingly exercises the lower half of the body¹. For this reason try to perform them one after the other.

Technique

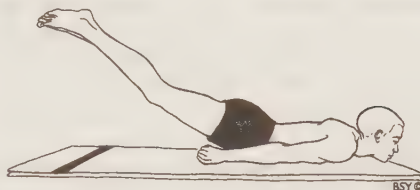
Place a blanket on the floor.

Lie flat on the ground, face downwards.

Your legs should be straight with the feet together; the soles should point upwards.

The arms can be placed either beside the body or under the body; the palms can face downwards, upwards or may be clenched.

The choice of the position of the hands and arms is left to the discretion of the practitioner through his own personal experience.



Keep the chin in contact with the ground throughout the practice.

The shoulders should be as near as possible to the floor and remain so throughout the practice.

Relax the whole body. Close your eyes. Breathe out deeply.

Then inhale deeply, hold your breath and raise both legs, keeping them together and straight.

The elevation of the legs is produced by applying pressure on the arms and contracting the lower back muscles.

Hold the legs in the raised position while retaining your breath.

Try to stretch your chin in front of you as much as possible but maintaining contact with the ground (this will give the best possible stretch to the neck muscles and nerves).

Hold the final position for as long as you can without straining.

Then slowly lower the legs and exhale.

This is 1 round.

Relax the whole body.

Allow the breathing rate to return to normal.

Then breathe out deeply, breathe in deeply, and raise the legs again to repeat another round.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale deeply and then inhale deeply while lying flat on the ground. Retain the breath while raising the legs and holding the legs in the final position. Exhale after you slowly lower the legs and breathe normally while relaxing the body.

Be aware of the breathing and movement throughout the practice. While resting between rounds remain aware of your breathing pattern and the relaxation of the whole body.

You can practise shalabhasana as many times as you wish, though three rounds is a reasonable number. Without straining, try to hold the pose for as long as possible.

Points to remember while doing the asana

Try to keep the shoulders as close to the ground as possible. Keep the chin in contact with the ground throughout the practice. Keep your legs straight there is a tendency to bend the legs when they are raised.

Ensure that your inhalation in the lying position immediately before doing the asana is as deep as possible. This ensures that you obtain the best possible massage of the abdomen, lungs and heart.

Try to allow the abdomen to sustain most of the body weight.

Limitations

This asana, compared to most other asanas, requires a greater degree of physical effort. As such, people who suffer from coronary thrombosis or high blood pressure must take care. They should preferably practise ardha shalabhasana as a substitute. Furthermore, if you suffer from hernia, peptic ulcer, intestinal tuberculosis and other similar ailments we advise you not to do this asana.

Shalabhasana has often been found useful for people who suffer from mild sciatica and slipped disc. However, you should take care, especially if your condition is serious.

Benefits

Shalabhasana stimulates the whole autonomic nervous system, particularly the parasympathetic outflow. Remember the parasympathetic system and the sympathetic system are opposing systems of the autonomic nervous system. They maintain equilibrium of the different organs of the body. In general, the sympathetic system directs the body energy externally. That is, the muscles are prepared for external activity, the heartbeat and respiration rate are increased, the digestive system functions at a lower level, eyesight and hearing improves – the emphasis is on extroversion. In particular, it prepares the body to face

emergencies or danger. The parasympathetic system acts in reverse; it allows the internal organs to carry out their functions, reducing the energy that is directed for external actions. One becomes more introverted.

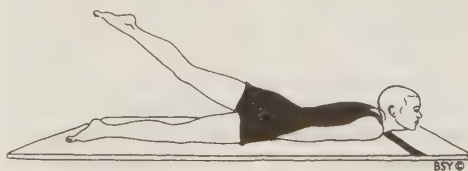
It is essential that the autonomic nervous system is kept in efficient order. Shalabhasana does this by stretching the nerves and improving the blood circulation, allowing new oxygenated blood to circulate. The parasympathetic nerves are particularly prominent in the region of the neck and pelvis. Shalabhasana profoundly affects both of these areas simultaneously.

All the abdominal organs are massaged. This massage is accentuated by the deep inhalation and retention of breath. Furthermore the pressure in the abdomen due to the weight of the body is transmitted to the lungs and heart via the diaphragm, improving the functioning of both these vital organs. For further details on this aspect refer to sarpasana which gives the same benefits in this direction¹.

This asana has been found useful for relieving sciatica and mild forms of slipped disc.

ARDHA SHALABHASANA (HALF LOCUST POSE)

This is much easier than shalabhasana and it gives almost the same benefits. Beginners should do this asana if they find shalabhasana too difficult.



Technique

Take the same starting position as given for shalabhasana.

Close your eyes and relax your whole body. Breathe out deeply.

Then breathe in deeply, retain the breath and raise your left leg.

Both your left leg and right leg should remain straight throughout the asana.

Try to use your right leg as little as possible to help raise the left leg; let it relax.

Use the back muscles as much as possible, assisted by the arms to raise the left leg. Keep your chin stretched forwards on the ground, and your shoulders as low as possible. Keep your left leg raised in the final position while holding your breath. Try to hold the final position for as long as possible without strain. Then lower the leg and breathe out slowly. Allow your respiration rate to return to normal while resting on the ground. Then repeat the same procedure with the other leg.

Breathing and duration

This is the same as shalabhasana, except that it is done before and after raising one leg, not two.

This asana is easier than shalabhasana so you can do it for a longer period of time. We suggest that you raise each leg three times alternately.

Further details

The left leg should be raised first. This is necessary so that the abdominal pressure is applied firstly on the right side of the abdomen, which in turn pressurizes and massages the ascending colon of the large intestine situated on the right side of the body. In this way the large intestine is massaged in the same order as the action of intestinal peristalsis. This is a great help in removing constipation.

Awareness, sequence, limitations, benefits and points to remember while doing the asana are the same as given for shalabhasana.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

In Lesson 8 we introduced you to antar kumbhaka (inner retention) as the third stage of nadi shodhana pranayama¹. We emphasized that you should slowly develop the ability to hold the breath for longer periods of time. This allows the body to make corresponding adjustments to meet the new operating conditions of the respiration cycle. For this reason, we advised that the practitioner limit his or her inner retention to no more than a count of ten (about ten seconds) for the first stage of antar kumbhaka practice¹.

If you have been practising nadi shodhana stage 3 regularly and find that you can easily retain your breath for a count of ten throughout continuously repeated rounds, then now start to slowly increase the duration of the retention. Aim to eventually make your ratio of one round as follows: 1:4:2: 1:4:2 for inhalation: retention: exhalation: inhalation: retention: exhalation. The last ratio given was 1:2:2: 1:2:2. All the details previously given will still apply, but with the gradually increased duration of retention. Don't try to achieve the final ratio in one day; take your time and progress gradually, measuring your progression by the easiness and calmness with which you perform the practices. Gasping for breath and easily becoming tired indicate that you are not ready to increase your ratio. "Slowly, but surely" is the motto to remember in pranayama, and in fact yoga in general. Remember also that the actual duration of the retention will depend on the duration of inhalation and exhalation, which will have been fixed in the previous practices of nadi shodhana 1 and 2².

If you have been practising nadi shodhana but find difficulty in holding your breath for more than a few counts, then continue with the ratio given previously¹. Don't try to make undue haste – let the wisdom of your body set the pace. If you have not been practising pranayama regularly then you

should master the more fundamental stages 1 and 2 before attempting antar kumbhaka². This is important.

The times of practice that we have given in the suggested practice programs are the bare minimum. Try to devote more time every day to doing nadi shodhana. If you can spend half an hour daily, diligently practising nadi shodhana, you will reap wonderful benefits.

Notes

¹ Nadi shodhana: Stage 3 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² Nadi shodhana: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 4

Mudras: Shambhavi Mudra

Shambhavi mudra (eyebrow centre gazing), the technique we will shortly describe, is very similar to *agochari mudra* (nose tip gazing)¹. The main difference is that the eyes are focussed on the eyebrow centre instead of the nose tip. It gives fundamentally the same benefits and the two mudras are equally as good as each other. They are both an integral part of *kriya yoga* and should therefore be mastered to a reasonable level of proficiency before starting to learn and practise *kriya yoga*.

Though this technique is called a *mudra*, it is also a meditative practice in its own right. As such the practitioner can perform *shambhavi mudra* (or *agochari mudra*) for a prolonged period of time to gain the same benefits and experiences as other meditation techniques.

SHAMBHAVI MUDRA (EYEBROW CENTRE GAZING)

Shambhavi is the name of the wife or consort of *Shambhu* (*Shiva*). She has many other names, such as *Parvati*, *Shakti*, etc., all of which have special significance in Indian mythology. It is believed that *Shambhu* taught *Shambhavi* the practice of *shambhavi mudra* and urged her to practise it diligently if she wanted higher awareness. It is said that the practice of *shambhavi mudra* will stir *Shambhu* (superconsciousness) and make him appear before you.

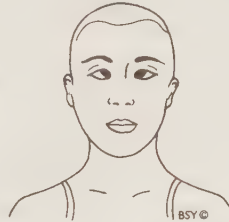
The practice is also known as *bhrumadhya drishti*. The word *bhrumadhya* means 'eyebrow centre', and *drishti* means 'gazing'. This name describes the practice exactly – eyebrow centre gazing.

Scriptural references

This practice (like *agochari mudra*) is widely quoted in the yogic scriptures. For example, in the *Gheranda Samhita* it states: "Direct your eyes towards the middle of the eyebrows. Reflect on your real nature. This is *shambhavi mudra*, the most secret of all tantric scriptures." (3: 59)

The same text devotes the next few verses to showering praise on this *mudra*. Among other things it says: "The man who diligently practises and knows *shambhavi mudra* becomes Lord *Shiva* himself. He becomes *Narayana* (*Vishnu*), the sustainer of all and also *Brahma*, the creator of the universe."

This means many things, most of which are understandable only when one knows the significance of the Hindu gods. But we can say that one of the meanings is that one can transcend the fetters of the individual ego through practising *shambhavi mudra* for a sufficiently long period of time. Through this one is able to expand awareness and see a significance and essence behind everything. Furthermore, one realizes that one's real nature is far more than we can normally conceive.



Technique

Take a comfortable sitting pose.

Straighten the back and head, place the hands on the knees and practise *jnana*, *chin* or *chinmaya mudra*².

First of all close your eyes for a short time and relax the whole body. Then open your eyes and try to focus both eyes at the eyebrow centre.

Of course it is difficult to actually fix the eyes on the eyebrow centre for it is out of the normal field of vision.

However, you must direct your eyes inwards and upwards so that they point as much as possible in the direction of the eyebrow centre.

It is important that both eyes converge towards this centre.

If this is done correctly you will see two curved images of the eyebrows, which merge with each other. They will meet at a point at the top of the nose and form a solid V-shaped point.

You have to be aware of the V point, for this is the approximate location of the eyebrow centre.

If you don't see this V formation, then this is a sure indication that your eyes are not converging as they should.

Be sure not to strain the eyes, but only practise for as long as you feel no discomfort.

If you experience discomfort, relax the eyes for a few seconds and then continue the practice. In this manner you will slowly increase the duration of eyebrow centre gazing.

When you hold the final position of the eyes for a minute or so without the slightest effort, you can enquire about your real nature.

Carry on in this manner for as long as you have time.

Method of converging the eyes

Shambhavi mudra should be practised after mastering agochari mudra for it is a little more difficult. The ability to perform nose tip gazing is a great help in gaining proficiency in gazing at the eyebrow centre.

Place one finger at the tip of the nose (if necessary repeat the method that we described for nose tip gazing.)¹

Focus both eyes on the fingertip.

Then slowly move the finger upwards keeping the eyes 'glued' to the fingertip.

If you do this properly you will find that you can quite easily practise shambhavi mudra. Your eyes will automatically be drawn upwards to focus on the eyebrow centre.

Internal Shambhavi Mudra

When you have mastered shambhavi mudra with the eyes open you can try the same practice with the eyes closed. It is a more powerful practice, for the awareness is less likely to be externalized. It is an excellent method of introspection. The only drawback is that it is far easier to relax the eyes, stop doing shambhavi mudra and not realize it. In the external form of shambhavi one can easily tell if the eyes are directed upwards or not by noting the V formation at the eyebrow centre.

In the inner form one must always be aware of the practice to ensure that the eyes are still facing upwards.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

Meditation: Trataka (Stage 2)

In the previous lesson we described outer trataka on a flame followed by inner trataka on the resulting after-image¹. The technique that we will shortly outline is a more advanced form of the same basic practice. It involves two extra techniques which make it more powerful in inducing mental peace and one-pointedness.

TRATAKA – STAGE 2

When one has practised trataka stage 1 for some time and has gained reasonable familiarity and competence in its practice, one should leave stage 1 and proceed to stage 2. The most important thing is that you should be able to gaze at the outer object for some time without any tendency to blink the eyelids. If you still find that your eyes flicker throughout the practice, it is far better that you continue stage 1 until you gain mastery in this respect. Furthermore, if you still don't see any after-image during inner trataka, you should also continue stage 1. If you don't see any after-image be sure not to worry, for it takes time with most people; nevertheless, slowly but surely at some stage in their practice they begin to discern an image. At first it is faint, but gradually over a period of days and weeks it becomes clearer.

General preparatory details

For general information on the choice of object of awareness, position of the object in relation to the sitting position and the posture itself, refer to the previous lesson: Trataka – Stage 1¹.

Technique

In line with the description of trataka stage 1 that we have given we will take the candle flame as our object of awareness.

There are four stages in the practice, each of which must be done in turn.

Stage 1: preparation

Take a comfortable pose, preferably one of the meditative asanas².

Adjust yourself and remove all sources of discomfort, so that you feel no necessity to move throughout the whole practice; it is far better to make adequate preparations now than to move your body during the practice.

Close your eyes.

Practise kaya shairyam for a few minutes³.

Be aware only of the body.

Make a resolve that you will not move your body for the entire practice.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: outer gazing

Open your eyes.

Gaze directly at the tip of the wick of the candle.

Practise outer trataka.

Try not to blink or move your eyes in any way.

Be totally absorbed only in the candle flame and wick.

If you are beset by extraneous thoughts, let them come; be aware of them and then gently remind yourself that you are practising trataka.

In this manner keep your attention focused on the flame and wick.

Continue in this manner for about 3 minutes.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: breath awareness

Perform khechari mudra⁴.

Become aware of your breath, while simultaneously maintaining awareness of the candle flame.

Practise ujjayi pranayama⁴.

Now you must use some imagination.

While breathing in, imagine that you are drawing your breath from the candle flame to the eyebrow centre and through to the back of the head.

You have to split your awareness, so that it dwells on both the candle flame and the movement of the breath.

Be also aware of the sound of your breath. When you breathe out you have to imagine that the breath flows from the back of your head, pierces the eyebrow centre and then returns to the candle flame.

Throughout the eyes should not flicker.

Carry on repeating this process, breathing in and out as you try to feel, to imagine, the air moving backwards and forwards from the flame, through the eyebrow centre to the back of the head and vice versa.

All the time you should be simultaneously aware of both the candle flame, the breath and its sound.

Eventually, if you practise with sufficient intensity and awareness, you should find that the air seems to naturally and actually move along the path between the flame and the back of the head.

Continue this practice for a few minutes.

Then do stage 4.

Stage 4: inner trataka

Close your eyes. Gaze at the after-image.

Gaze at the inner-image in the same way as you did the outer object.

Be aware of both the internal candle flame and the breath.

If the image is not clear, don't worry; merely be aware of whatever you can see.

As you breathe in, feel the breath moving backwards from the flame in front of the closed eyes to the back of the head.

Try to feel that you are drawing the image backwards.

As you breathe out, imagine that the breath is being pushed forwards to the closed eyes.

Carry on in this way.

Inhale and almost pull the image and the breath backwards. Exhale and push the image and the breath forwards.

All the time your awareness should be on the image and the breath.

Continue khechari mudra and ujjayi pranayama throughout.

Because you are practising ujjayi you should hear a continuous sound emerging from the region of the throat; try to be also aware of this sound, but integrate it with the movement of the breath from the eyebrow centre to the back of the head. In this way imagine that the sound arises as the breath moves to and fro through the head.

Try to become totally absorbed in the practice. Continue until the image becomes vague or disappears.

Then open your eyes and repeat stage 2 for a few minutes, if possible without flickering your eyes (those who wish to practise breath awareness continuously can miss stage 2 and start the next round with stage 3.)

Then proceed to stage 3 and repeat the whole process. Continue in this manner for the duration of the practice.

At the end of the practice keep your eyes closed for a few minutes and merely watch the black space (chidakasha) in front of the closed eyes. Be a witness to any thoughts or psychic visions that may arise.

Then open your eyes and blow out the candle.

Division of practice

The longer one is able to practise the internal steps of the practice the better. In other words, if you find that you can easily retain a clear inner-image, reduce or even eliminate the external steps. Of course, if you cannot see a clear after-image you should increase the duration of the external steps.

The number of rounds or repetitions depends entirely on your ability to retain the inner-image. Those who are more proficient will perhaps only need to do one round, for they will be able to hold the inner-image throughout the duration of the practice. Beginners, on the other hand, will have to do a number of repetitions according to their proficiency and the duration of the practice.

Awareness

As much as possible maintain awareness of the candle flame, the movement of the breath and the resulting sound, depending on the step being practised.

Further details

For other information on benefits, precautions, or problems to be overcome refer to the previous trataka lesson¹.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

There are thousands of yogic practices. It is possible to write books about them for the next twenty years and still find more. The number is inexhaustible. However, in this course we are not really interested in flooding you with uncountable techniques, for this is more likely to overwhelm you than help you. It is possible to become fatigued by a continuous stream of techniques, so much so that one ceases to practise even one of them. It is far better to know one and practise it, than know thousands and practise none of them.

Having said this, however, we must point out it is necessary to describe a reasonable number of techniques, so that each reader can find techniques that suit his particular taste and temperament. So far in this book we have given you quite a large number and variety, far too many for you to practise on a regular basis. You must exercise discretion and choose the techniques that suit your taste, and practise them. If there is a particular technique that you especially like, then do it regularly.

You are the one to choose. Of course, you can follow the recommended programs for this automatically leaves out techniques that cannot be performed due to lack of time. But at the same time don't feel obliged to stick rigidly to the program we offer. If we omit a practice that you like then you must arrange that practice into your own program and practise it daily.

Only if you have mastered *trataka* stage 1, should you proceed to stage 2¹. The same applies to *shambhavi mudra*; start to practise it if you have the time, when you have perfected *agochari mudra*². Remember that both these mudras are an integral part of *kriya yoga* and as such should be perfected before you attempt the practices of Book III.

Try to put into practice the suggestions regarding conscious reorientation of your life along new directions, as the first step to confronting and exhausting mental problems.

Continue with *nadi shodhana pranayama* as described in this lesson.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka: Stage 2	—	30
Shambhavi Mudra	—	10
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour		
Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3	—	10
Trataka: Stage 2	—	20
Shambhavi Mudra	—	5
		60

Program 3: duration ¼ hour

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	5
Trataka: Stage 2	—	20
		45

Program 4: duration ½ hour for physical fitness

Surya Namaskara	to suit time	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana or Ardha Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Meru Wakrasana	2 each side	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3	—	7
		30

Try to find some time to practise Trataka for at least 20 minutes every day, preferably before sleep.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

Lesson 10

A large camel train passed through the desert and arrived at an oasis, where it was decided to take rest for the night. Drivers and beasts were all anxious to sleep, but when it was time to secure the camels, they found that they were short of one hitching-pin. All the camels were duly tied up, except one. The drivers searched for some means to tether the animal, but none could be found. No one wanted to stand watch all night and lose the night's sleep. Yet at the same time the drivers did not want to lose the camel.

After some thought, one of the drivers had a good idea. He went to the camel, took the rope and carefully went through all the motions of tethering the animal to a pin – an imaginary pin. Afterwards the camel was bedded down, convinced that it was securely bound, and a good night's rest was had by all.

The following morning the camels were released. Everyone made ready to continue the journey, except one camel. It refused to get up. The drivers cajoled and coaxed, but the beast would not move. Eventually one of the drivers

realized the reason for the camel's obstinacy. He stood before the imaginary hitching-pin and went through all the usual motions of untying the rope and releasing the animal. Immediately afterwards, the camel stood up without the slightest hesitation, believing that it was now free.

Of course the camel had been free all the time, but it had allowed itself to be convinced that it was bound. It is the same with each human being – he too is always potentially free, but most people allow themselves to be bound by their mental problems and seemingly oppressive responsibilities. You are really as free as the unpegged camel, yet through conditioning and misconceptions, you think that you are firmly bound. You compare yourself with others, in the same way as the camel did, and automatically believe that you are limited. But you are really free – understand this clearly. All you have to do is to unhitch, release yourself from your mental problems, the imaginary pin of your bondage. All you have to do is to change your attitude.

Guru: The Guiding Light

To light a candle one needs another burning candle; in the same way those who are unenlightened need the help of an illumined guru.

—Swami Sivananda

The Sanskrit word *guru* means 'remover of darkness and ignorance'. It is a negative term in that it does not say that the guru gives you anything, only that he removes something. He removes the mental blocks and obstacles that prevent the spontaneous effulgence of the light of truth. The guru's role is to remove the veil, the ignorance, the preconceived ideas and mental conditioning that prevent the already existing light from shining through. The more this accumulated dross is removed, the greater will be our awareness of ourselves and existence.

The means adopted by the guru varies greatly. It can be by personal instruction, by inspiring his followers, by rebuking his disciples for actions which are not in accordance with their nature (adharmic) and by guiding disciples so that their actions are appropriate to their own physical and mental make-up (dharma). But whatever the method used, the aim is the same: higher awareness.

The guru-disciple relationship

In a personal relationship between a guru and a disciple, the guru by virtue of his higher awareness can clearly see the mental blocks that the disciple himself cannot see. He takes steps to help the disciple remove them, by any means that are suitable and justified. The guru supplies the strength which makes progress possible in spiritual life, and the divine love which makes it so rewarding and joyful.

The influence of the guru on the life of the disciple is very real but not always obvious. The process generally takes place on a subtle level and the relationship between guru and disciple on the physical level has little to do with it. In many cases the disciple never, or only

rarely, sees the guru physically. On the other hand the disciple gives himself completely to the guru, using him as a focus for his spiritual aspirations. In a sense the goal of spiritual life, no matter what religion or philosophy, is to transcend the individual self and become united with the infinite nature of the guru. The guru is the gateway to the infinite through which the disciple tries to pass. The guru is the instrument of the God we are all striving towards. He is not interested in his disciples from a personal point of view. His interest is to take us all beyond ourselves to the personal realization of the eternal truth.

The only reason that the guru retains his individuality instead of merging with the absolute is the disciple's need for him. As humans we need a human focus or medium through which we can project ourselves and from whom we can receive truly effective guidance. Few people are able to directly worship and give themselves to an abstract, impersonal God. Moreover, it is impossible to embark on the higher paths of yogic sadhana (spiritual practice) without the supervision of someone who knows its complexities and pitfalls. The guru does not need us, but we need the guru.

The love between guru and disciple embraces and transcends all other human relationships – mother and child, husband and wife or lifetime friends. It is through the guru-disciple relationship that the disciple's potential and energy are given shape and direction to work the best possible good in the world as part of the divine plan.

Traditions of the guru

The guru tradition is common to all religious systems throughout the world. The founders and figureheads of all major religions are gurus: Christ, Mohammed, Buddha, Zarathustra and many more. These gurus have millions of disciples, even though they are

no longer in human form to guide their followers; instead other gurus have taken over the role of transmitting their teachings. In the present day the Pope can be regarded as the guru for Roman Catholics and the Dalai Lama for Tibetans. In Hinduism there are four jagat gurus (universal gurus) in four centres throughout India who act as spiritual leaders for millions of Hindus. On a more personal level, each priest, parson, mullah, rabbi, etc. can be considered as a guru for the group of people that he spiritually instructs. Even the cults of antiquity had gurus. The Druids were spiritual teachers who helped their disciples to higher levels of awareness; in ancient Egypt, Greece, etc., many of the well-known philosophers were gurus: Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, Socrates, Archimedes and others – all had many disciples. Lao Tse, Shankaracharya, Kabir, Guru Nanak, St. Augustine, St. Teresa, the Jewish prophets, the Sufi saints and others too numerous to mention were all gurus. These teachers guided and inspired people on their spiritual path. Their words are perhaps different but their aim is the same: truth, consciousness and bliss.

The guru is an essential part of life. His role is the essence of all mystical systems. As soon as a mystical system discards or loses the guru tradition, then it no longer remains mystical. It does not bring results. It retains all the laws, rules, formalities and rites; it retains the structure or the shell. But it loses the essence or the moving spirit behind it. This essence is the light of the guru. It is he who opens the disciple's eyes to the impossible.

There is a special day in India, the day of the full moon in the month of Ashadha (July), which is traditionally called Guru Poornima. On this day disciples pay homage to the guru, whether mentally from a distance or by their physical presence. At the same time the guru remembers his own guru.

Actually everyone we meet in life can be regarded as our guru because each person can teach us something. Even our enemies can be our best teachers, for they clearly highlight and show us our greatest problems, the obstacles to higher awareness. When we know our mental complexes, the deeper ones of which we are not normally aware, then we can take steps to remove them.

How to find the guru

If you have no guru, you may well ask: "How will I find him?" The answer is that you must just go on looking and following the path of tantra-yoga or any other system as a means to bring about greater levels of mental and physical harmony. This will accentuate your sensitivity and receptivity and eventually your guru will find you. We can never find the guru because we cannot recognize him. If we try to choose our own guru, we will choose according to our mental conditionings and projections. And if we choose a teacher who conforms to our present mental whims, then we will never be able to remove those whims, the very aspects of our personality which keep us in bondage. We should remain open, receptive and make personal efforts to tread the yogic path to mental harmony, breaking down current preconceptions. One way to do this is to hear satsang (spiritual teachings) of wise men whenever possible¹. There is no need to make any commitment or confine yourself to one teacher or one belief, just go and listen. This will help you to direct your life in positive directions. When you are ready, your guru will be waiting for you. Maybe in the next lifetime! Even if you are not looking for a guru he will find you. The guru appears when the time is ripe.

It is essential that the guide be a true guru (sadguru) who is himself fully enlightened and with the highest vision. Such a being lives constantly in a transcendental state of awareness, always in communion with the absolute reality. Even while he lives and acts with people in the world, the guru is one with this infinite reality, for it is his own inner nature or Self, as it is of all other beings, whether they have realized it or not. The guru's individuality as a human being is just one tiny aspect of his being. His personality is a perfect and pure instrument of the infinite, through which unlimited power flows unceasingly to the world around him.

Notes

¹ For further details on the subject of satsang refer to Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 1.

Removal of Mental Problems (Part 2)

The most common manifestation of underlying mental problems is dissatisfaction with the present. This applies to almost everybody. How often do you actually live totally in the NOW? If you are honest with yourself, then you will admit that most of the time, no matter what is being done, you are dreaming or wishing for something else. When you walk to work in the morning you wish you were still in bed. When you are working you wish you were still on holidays and having great fun with friends. When you work in the garden you wish you were eating that wonderful tasty meal that you ate last weekend; and when you take your food you are thinking of the time that you went for a walk in the countryside or worrying about work problems and so on. Very rarely do people live in the present and totally concentrate on the activities in hand. For this reason people perform most actions in life half-heartedly and with very little efficiency and enthusiasm. How is it possible to work properly when the attention of the mind is elsewhere, when the mind is jumping from one thought to another like a wild monkey jumping from one branch to another in a tree?

Yet it is certain that everybody at one time or another has experienced periods, perhaps of short duration, when they were totally concentrated on one activity or something of deep absorbing interest. And if you retrospect, you will perhaps remember that those periods were times of great joy and happiness. Try to recall your past experiences and confirm this fact for yourself. Or you may have noticed when you do your yogic practices that you sometimes feel a wonderful sense of joy welling up from within you. This is particularly noticeable when you are mentally balanced and when you perform your practices with intense awareness. These experiences are so overwhelming that it is difficult to forget them. One of the reasons for this feeling of joy and happiness is the mere fact that for a

short time you lived in the present. That is, during your most memorable yoga practices, you were absorbed in the practice at hand; you stopped obsessively dwelling on other unrelated thoughts. Your attention was on the now. It is the same when you were reading an interesting book, or totally absorbed yourself with an interesting but friendly discussion or involved with your stamp collection. It is living in the present that is important.

This living in the present is an essential part of yoga. Yet at the same time it cannot be developed. A person cannot say to himself: "From now on I am going to live in the present," for within a few minutes he would be living in the past or future again. The reason for continual projection, living in the past or future, is mental disturbances. Therefore, the only really effective way to live more and more in the present is to empty the mind of its hidden problems. Merely being told of the importance of living in the present is not enough, for it can never be practised until mental problems are eliminated. When this is done then living in the present becomes spontaneous and no effort is required.

This attitude is not only important in yoga, it is an integral part of all spiritual systems, which is not surprising, for living in the present is a basic prerequisite of higher awareness. Zen Buddhism in particular emphasizes this point. For example, a Zen master was once asked: "What is the Tao?" He sharply replied: "Your everyday mind." He continued: "When I'm hungry, I eat; when I'm tired, I sleep." This statement seems at first to be rather trite, but it contains a great truth. The person who asked the question was understandably a little perplexed, for this definition of the Tao seemed a little irrelevant, especially since everyone performs the actions described by the master. But what the master was trying to convey is that most people are never, or at least rarely, absorbed in their actions. When they

are eating, they are thinking of multitudes of other activities. When they are sleeping, they are not really sleeping but are caught up in the turmoil of their mind. The master is inferring that a person in higher awareness is totally at one with what he is doing at any given time; the mind is totally concentrated and not scattered in all directions.

Your ability to live in the present and totally absorb yourself in the activities or work being done, without allowing the mind to project vicariously elsewhere, is also a proof of whether or not you have mental problems. If you are continually living elsewhere, with the mind wandering hither and thither, wishing you were doing something else other than what you are actually trying to do, then this is an immediate indication of underlying disturbance. The more the mind projects elsewhere, the more problems you are likely to have. So you can ask yourself the question, "How much do I really concentrate on what I'm doing, without wishing I was doing something else?" Be honest, and you can convince yourself of whether or not you have mental problems.

Why do we continually tend to relive the past, or project into the future with anticipation of events to come? The answer is basically simple – escapism and attachment to intoxicating experiences. Because we are dissatisfied, we try to escape by re-experiencing high points of happiness in the past and by anticipating possible high experiences in the future. For example, we feel depressed on a quiet Sunday afternoon, the result of inner disturbances, perhaps in response to outer events. What better way is there to escape this depression, at least to some degree, than by imagining you are eating a hot, delicious dinner, or that you are with an old girl friend or boy friend? This living out of the present is the easiest way to escape discontentment. Yet it does not lead to deeper happiness and certainly not to higher states of awareness. Most people are in a continuous dream state. They think that they are awake, but they are in fact, sleepwalking. They are not living their life as it really is, but are creating their own hell, heaven or haven of retreat. These are only methods to escape oneself, and to avoid facing up to and removing one's mental problems. And until a person begins to face his problems, there will never be any real change in his dream-like

existence. He will never really start to find lasting happiness and satisfaction.

So cleaning out the mind is the first step in progressively seeing life as it really is and not as you imagine. Yet this requires courage, for the subconscious mind is the repository of basic fears, and it can often be quite frightening to see their root face to face. You need to be fearless and determined to face them and eliminate them. But the benefits you will gain in the long run are more than worth the effort, for your life will progressively undergo a miraculous transformation. Slowly but surely you will start to know what joy really means.

Mental problems and illness

The relationship between mental problems and mental and physical ailments need not be dealt with in great detail here, for most people fully accept that almost all illnesses are a result of some kind of mental disturbance. We merely want to emphasize this point.

The mind, on a personal level, is in a continual state of activity at all stratas. Ideally these processes should occur spontaneously and naturally, without the slightest hindrance. In the mind of most people, however, there is psychological constipation and indigestion, caused by mental frustrations. This results in the growth of psychological tumours in the mind. If these tumours, blocks, frustrations and mental problems are sufficiently intense they can result in psychosomatic illnesses and/or mental illnesses or breakdowns. If the mental problems are milder, but nevertheless present, they will manifest in the form of unhappiness and depression; in fact general discontent with one's relationship with life and other people.

It is widely accepted that there are many illnesses which manifest physically, but which have psychological causes. In modern language these are called psychosomatic diseases. Under this heading are included more obvious related diseases such as neuritis, but actually yoga believes that almost all diseases are caused by mental disturbances. Modern science is slowly coming around to the same conclusion by experiment. For example, the general treatment for cancer in recent times has been radioactive bombardment of the cancerous area. Yet at a symposium held at Stanford University in U.S.A. in 1972, a

radiologist had a far reaching conclusion to convey to medical science. His revelation caused a stir at the meeting. He said that he had been using radiology for many years in the treatment of cancer patients. Because of the widespread occurrence of cancer; thousands of patients besieged him seeking a cure. He of course could not treat them all at the same time and so he was forced to make many of them wait for treatment, often for several weeks. Some of the people were suffering great pain. The usual method of combating this pain is administration of drugs. To reduce this dependence on drugs, the radiologist recommended that the patients relieve their pain by practising relaxation and meditation techniques. To his great surprise many of these people showed marked improvement in their state of health. His conclusion, which he presented to the members of the symposium, was obvious: the cause of cancer lies in the mind, nowhere else. We would also like to add one point: many people claim that the cause of cancer, the only cause, is cigarette smoking. Figures and statistics are presented which clearly show and prove that the incidence of cancer is greater with smokers than with non-smokers. This may be true, but they miss one important factor; namely, that people who smoke are generally those who are very tense. We are not saying that this is the reason why they smoke, but that those who smoke have a tendency to be more tension-ridden. Therefore, we feel that the cause of cancer is not the smoking, but mental tension. Smoking may have some bearing no doubt, but it is a side issue.

It is a similar case with diabetes. Many people attribute its cause to the malfunctioning of the pancreas and perhaps the pituitary gland. No doubt this is the obvious cause of the lack of insulin. But what is the reason for the malfunction in the first place? From contact with large numbers of diabetics in the ashram, we feel that the original cause definitely lies in the mind. Mental disturbance and continual stress interfere with the harmonious working of the physical organs causing them to break down. We know many cases of diabetics who have learned to relax more in life, through yoga practices, and their diabetes has completely disappeared or at least been reduced.

We could talk about numerous other illnesses, epilepsy, heart problems and ulcers, in the same way, but this is not the purpose of this discussion. We merely want to draw your attention to the importance that the mind has on health and lack of health. With removal of mental problems, incredible changes take place in the body and state of health. Many miraculous cures of all types of so-called incurable diseases can be obtained by relaxing the deeper realms of the subconscious mind, by throwing out or coming to terms with one's inner problems. This has been proved over and over again – psychosomatic diseases miraculously disappear.

Incidentally, this also applies to more general illnesses such as common colds, which seem to be caused by germs and nothing else. Well this may be true, we are not disputing this argument. But at the same time, each person has inherent powers to resist the occurrence of disease. The body under normal conditions has powerful autotherapeutic and protective powers to resist disease. Mental problems seriously interfere with this innate property of the physical body and reduce its effectiveness in fighting or preventing the occurrences of illnesses. A clean mind allows the physical body to perform its duties unimpeded. For this reason, the more you remove your problems, the less vulnerable you will be to the onset of disease. This is proved by the fact that people who have a calm and relaxed attitude to life suffer illness of any type much less frequently than other more tension-ridden people.

So emptying your mind of its negative contents will have far reaching consequences on your health. If you are now reasonably healthy, then you will become super healthy. You will start to radiate health. If you now suffer from any kind of disease, especially the more serious ones such as heart problems, cancer, etc., we strongly advise you to start cleaning your mind and learning to relax. Start to practise yoga, for this is the way to cure, in a real sense, your disease and relieve your suffering. Other methods are more than likely to be superficial.

Man is already a harmonious whole

Many schools of thought say that we are already in a state of perfection and that we always have been and always will be. They believe that there

is no need to do anything or even attempt to change ourselves for we are already perfect. In a higher sense this is absolutely true, but this does not help the person, in fact most people who have mental conflicts and problems. On a more basic level, which is the important level at this stage, people do have problems – they don't function as one harmonious whole. It is only when these problems are resolved that this statement about the inherent harmony of man has any sense, or can even be understood. So let us work on a more basic and practical level by acknowledging that most people do have problems, and that they have to be solved.

Yoga aims to bring about this total harmony between one's fundamental drives, emotions, feelings, intellect, will and one's interpersonal and social relationships. It is meaningless and inconsequential to tell people that they are already in a state of perfection. Their own experience and unhappiness tells them otherwise.

TECHNIQUES

When a person is experiencing mental or emotional anguish or strife, other people often try to console them by saying: "It's all in the mind." Of course, this is fundamentally true, but the statement is usually said in such a way that infers that the problem is not important for it is only in the mind. It implies that anything which has its source in the mind is inconsequential and perhaps a little unreal. If we forget, or if we close our eyes to an object it does not cease to exist; it is still there. Similarly, subconscious disturbances, childhood impressions, etc. do not disappear when a person is not aware of them. They remain in the mind and can cause havoc in an individual's daily life. The parts of the subconscious mind that one is not aware of at present are every bit as real as internal or external things of which we are aware. So to console a person with mental conflict or physical ailments that it is only in the mind (and therefore not worth worrying about) is merely evading the most important issue at hand. It is these seemingly unreal inner mental problems, conscious and subconscious, that are the internal objects that cause unhappiness in the outer interaction with the world. We want to make this point clear.

Because some people don't fully accept that the mind is the real reason behind their dissatisfaction, and perhaps that the contents of the mind are somehow imaginary, they usually attempt to combat unhappiness by striving to alter their outer interaction with life and other people. Although this may help, it merely treats the symptoms and not the cause. Adapting to the external environment is important, no doubt, but it must be supplemented by a more basic and lasting remedy¹. That is, it is necessary to explore and clean out the negative contents of the mind. The method that we will discuss in this topic is meditation practices.

1. Meditation practices for removing mental problems

We have already described various forms of meditation practices, together with an explanation of the theory of meditation. For this reason we will not delve into the individual practices as such, but will concern ourselves with showing how meditation techniques can be used to remove mental problems.

As you become more competent in meditative practices and learn to relax more, you will begin to delve into your subconscious mind and will come face to face with strong thoughts and visions; many of these will represent your subconscious and suppressed problems. Do not worry if you don't have these experiences, for time and practice are both necessary before achieving some success.

You may become aware of some gruesome aspects of your mind. These must not be suppressed, but allowed to arise. They may create emotional responses such as fear; this is almost to be expected. But as much as possible you must try to watch these manifestations of the subconscious mind bubble to the surface without like or dislike, without any emotional link whatsoever. You must be aware of them. This is essential. If you fight them, resist them, or perhaps even enjoy them you will not be purging them. It is essential that you watch the occurrence with a feeling of total detachment. Imagine that they are occurring outside yourself. That is, you must try to develop the attitude that these occurrences are somehow separate to yourself. Don't identify with them for this will only push them back into the subconscious.

The mere fact that you are conscious of the subconscious manifestations with a detached attitude is in itself a powerful weapon in eliminating the hold they have over your life. The mere recognition of them with awareness is sufficient to remove the underlying, mental disturbances from your mind. In fact you have almost no choice – the problems are automatically scrubbed from the mind. Many people practise meditation techniques and may have no overwhelming confrontation with fearful data, yet after some time they notice a great change in their attitude towards life. The cleaning has been occurring but in more subtle ways. Some people; on the other hand, are suddenly confronted with a great gush of their subconscious problems. They may even be unhappy for some time, but again the overall result will be greater contentment in life. The experiences that you will go through only you will know. But whatever 'garbage' you confront and exhaust will definitely be beneficial; of this there is no doubt.

How does mere awareness of this subconscious data remove it from the mind? There may be a combination of reasons, but our belief is as follows. To explore the subconscious in the first place there has to be a reasonable degree of relaxation. Without a measure of relaxation a person's attention will remain externalized; it cannot go inwards to the inner world of the mind. Therefore, when this subconscious data is recognized you must be in a relaxed state. You have no choice. From your own experience in the external world you will know that when you are relaxed, events or confrontations with situations no longer have the same influence on you, as they would if you are tense. When you are relaxed you automatically see things in a new light. They have less adverse effects on your being. It is the same when you face your subconscious problems during meditation techniques. Besides recognizing them more clearly in the first place, they no longer greatly affect you and because of your state of relaxation and awareness you exhaust them. If you were tense and faced your inner problems (which is probably impossible) they would more than likely have a great influence on you and you would not exhaust them.

This method of confronting problems in a state of relaxation is widely used in psychiatry,

as a method of exhausting a patient's conflicts, conscious or subconscious. It is called desensitization and will be discussed subsequently. The basic mechanics and idea is the same as in meditation techniques.

Though it may seem no more than playing with words, we would like to make one point clear; namely that subconscious data inherent in mental problems cannot really be removed from the mind. We often say that problems are or should be removed from the mind. This is merely an expression, for in fact all the data in the mind is permanently imprinted there. What we really mean when we talk about removing mental problems is that one's reaction to inner problems or memories is removed. For the purpose of explanation we can say that a mental problem is composed of two aspects: the actual data (i.e. cows) and the emotional response (i.e. fear) to that data. Therefore, when a mental problem is removed, what is really meant is that the emotional response has been neutralized. The emotional response is in a sense disconnected with the subconscious data. For example, perhaps one reacts with fear when confronted by a cow, perhaps because a big cow chased you when you were three years of age. When the problem is removed, perhaps by meditation techniques, the subconscious data still remains in the mind, but now the fear is no longer associated with cows. You will see cows, maybe even remember when you were chased by the big cow, but now you will no longer feel fear. This is what we mean when we say that mental problems are removed from the mind. The emotional response is neutralized. This may seem a technical point, and perhaps a little laboured and irrelevant, but we have emphasized it so that you more clearly understand the process involved in the cleaning out of the mind. This will also further clarify why it is important to recognize subconscious data with an attitude of detachment and awareness. It is in order to change your emotional reaction to subconscious problems, so that instead of experiencing negative emotions one feels indifference. In other words, the aim is to see your mental problems and in a sense overwrite, replace your usual emotional responses with another response which is devoid of emotional content – detachment. When you have no emotional response to subconscious data, then

you have removed that particular problem. The aim is to neutralize, disconnect all negative emotions with all subconscious data.

The reader should not however make the mistake of assuming that all the purging of the undesirable elements of the subconscious mind occurs during the meditation practice. This would be totally incorrect, for the process of cleaning the mind occurs in a nebulous manner and at the most unexpected times in daily life. Somehow meditation practices and yoga techniques in general sharpen one's sensitivity to associations with outside events. This is a difficult subject to discuss and perhaps the best way is to give a concrete example. The following was an actual experience.

When a sadhaka was about ten or twelve years of age, fishing was the most gratifying and enjoyable preoccupation in life. The bait which was generally put on the hook was a maggot, the larva form of bluebottles called gentles. These were purchased by the thousands in a specially designed metal box from a local shop that catered exclusively for fishing. After a day of fishing it was customary to throw all the maggots in the river as feed for the fish and to empty the box. On one occasion the maggots were kept in the metal box with the intention of using them on the following day. But actually that following day did not arise for some reason. Maggots, as nature intended, have a natural habit of changing into flies. And just this happened within the confines of the box, but the boy did not know, for he was too preoccupied with other interests to even give it a second thought. Then one day he opened the box, curious to see what was in it. And he was petrified, for hundreds of black, buzzing flies surged into his face on their way to freedom. The mind is very impressionable at any age, especially when young, and that experience left a strong emotional shock and fear clearly imprinted in his subconscious mind. After a day or so the event was forgotten or suppressed, but the fear remained. It did not surface again to conscious perception until one day in the ashram. Early one morning after an hour and a half of yogic practices, he was idly gazing out of the ashram from a second storey room, when he spotted about twenty-five jet black pigs. There was almost an explosion in his mind and suddenly the vision of those multitudes

of flies emerged to conscious perception. The group of pigs had stimulated the emergence of this subconscious memory. An outside event had brought to conscious perception a long forgotten emotional shock. Had this occurrence happened when the sadhaka was tense and not relaxed then he would have probably felt some form of unhappiness or depression, without actually knowing the cause. The problem would have caused its damage and remained in the confines of the mind. But under the actual circumstances, he was very relaxed. As such, the problem in its root form came to perception and was exhausted. The impression of the pigs and the flies was shrugged off without the slightest emotional upset. Directly it was the stimulus given by the pigs, but indirectly it was the state of relaxation and the influence of meditation practices. This is an example from experience to illustrate how meditation practices and yoga in general work to exhaust problems in subtle ways. The reader may possibly have similar experiences.

Meditation practices also contribute to removing mental problems in a more positive manner. That is, they don't only lead to removal of emotional links with conflicts, but depending on the depth and proficiency of the individual they lead to joy and knowledge. This acts as a strong current that in a sense overwhelms one's mental problems and makes them seem unimportant. One is so much influenced by the joy and new knowledge acquired that one will begin to see life in a new light. One's attitude to other people and situations will change in a positive direction. A taste of meditation, real meditation, is so overwhelming that conflicts seem almost trivial and insignificant in comparison. This automatically leads to the removal and neutralizing of one's problems.

So if you want to find peace and joy in your life, we urge you in no uncertain terms to begin meditation practices now. And by this we mean asana, pranayama and relaxation techniques, for in our opinion these are really (if done properly) no less than forms of meditation techniques.

2. Desensitization

Many people have problems that they know with certainty, yet still the problems cannot be

removed. That is, even though the problems are consciously known, they still continue to assert a negative influence on an individual's life. An example, common with many people, is fear of insects such as spiders. They are fully aware of this fear for whenever they see an insect they immediately suffer an emotional upset, sometimes great, sometimes small, depending on the nature of the confrontation. That is, if the individual is in a state of tension, or if the spider is seen suddenly or under particularly unexpected circumstances, the intensity of the emotional shock will be greater.

The real cause of this fear lies, of course, in the subconscious mind and will no doubt be eventually thrown out by meditation techniques. But there is a more direct method of neutralizing conscious fears, which is very simple and yet very effective. It is called *desensitization*. The method is as follows: first of all, you must relax yourself as much as possible. This can be achieved by practising your normal daily yoga program, or by practising a meditation technique or shavasana for some time.

Choose a convenient method that you think will induce the greatest relaxation. When you are relaxed, you must try to visualize yourself confronting the object of your fear. In other words, mentally create a picture of the object. Let us take fear of mice, as an example. Try to visualize a picture of a mouse or mice; the clearer the image the better. If you have difficulty in visualizing a mouse then try to relive and revive memories of your past, perhaps uncomfortable and unpleasant ones, in which you interacted with a mouse. Do this as intensely as you can. At first you may experience great fear. If the fear becomes too great then of course discontinue the practice. But if possible face the problem and totally confront the object of your fear. Do this for a few minutes if possible and then rest. The following day repeat the process, making sure that you are relaxed as much as possible prior to the practice. You should find that your emotional reaction to the object of your fear is reduced. Confront yourself with all aspects of the mouse (or whatever your fear is) – a big mouse, many mice, mice in disturbing surroundings. Confront yourself with as many associations of mice that your mind can think of or visualize.

You should repeat the procedure on a daily basis until such time as you experience absolutely no emotional response whatsoever. When you can create images and thoughts of a mouse and remain detached, a witness, then you have essentially exhausted your fear. If you wish you can test whether or not the fear still remains by actually facing the object in the outside world. This is your choice. If the fear is still there, then of course you must continue with the practice until the object is no longer a disturbance in your life. The same procedure can and should be repeated with any fear that is known to you. It can be fear of the opposite sex, of heights, of darkness or any phobia in fact that you can think of.

The rationale of this technique is simple, namely that people are less likely to react emotionally to objects that are normally objects of fear, if the objects are confronted in states of relaxation. In everyday life one would jump when confronted with the frightening object, but during relaxation the emotional reaction is either lessened or nullified. In a sense the fear is overcome and the ability to face the object during a period of relaxation carries over into daily life. This technique is commonly used by psychiatrists in the following manner.

A patient acknowledges that he is afraid of something, perhaps lizards. The psychiatrist systematically relaxes the patient. Then the psychiatrist shows the patient a picture that illustrates the fear, in this example a photograph or drawing of a lizard, or describes a vivid picture of a lizard, which the patient tries to visualize. Instead of reacting with fear the patient is calmer and is shown that the lizard can be faced and that it need not always be an object of dread. From this, the patient eventually becomes able to face lizards in the outside world. The system in yoga is the same but the individual must be his own psychiatrist.

This method is an excellent tool in exhausting mental problems and their accompanying emotions, and is a good supplement for meditation techniques. The reader is recommended to use it widely to combat the more obvious, conscious fears.

3. Autosuggestion

This is also a very simple yet powerful technique. If required, it can be used in conjunction with desensitization.

The power of suggestion is well known. It is so powerful that many people autosuggest themselves into illnesses. In other words, they think that they will suffer from an illness and in time they do suffer. People are continually autosuggesting themselves into negative situations. They feel inferior and eventually they act and project themselves as being inferior. On the other hand, some people think that they are superior and so their whole being and attitude towards life is pervaded with a feeling of superiority. Each of these states is as bad as the other, but they do illustrate the power of suggestion. Another person desires very much to pass an examination; he creates an autosuggestion and it is more than probable that he will pass. It depends on the depth of the autosuggestion; a shallow, half-hearted suggestion is unlikely to bring results, but a strong autosuggestion that penetrates the depths of the mind, will bring results without doubt. Autosuggestion is the driving force behind our actions in life, and by this we include suggestion from other people and the environment for these in turn are translated into autosuggestion. That is, in life we are continually receiving suggestions from our surroundings and other people and in turn transmitting our own suggestions. This in turn, if powerful enough and motivating enough, is transformed into autosuggestions. Take an example: a person meets another person who impresses him very much. If this impression is very deep (we would say suggestion) then that individual develops an autosuggestion to aspire to be like the person he met. Another person sees a beautiful garden, and if his nature is such, this suggestion will transform into autosuggestion to create his own garden to the same degree of beauty. The examples are endless. Our aim is to clearly and briefly convince you of the power of autosuggestion.

Autosuggestion is a powerful tool for eradicating and neutralizing mental problems. Let us take an example by considering a person who is scared of the dark. Since we spend much of our lives in the dark, and in fact it is impossible to totally avoid the dark, this fear or phobia will cause the individual a lot of mental distress. His mind will be in a continual state of tension and trepidation, consciously and subconsciously for he will always anticipate the next time he will be plunged into the infernal

blackness. The original cause of the problem lies in the subconscious and must be recognized and eliminated eventually by meditation practices. Autosuggestion, however, is a valuable tool in helping him to come to terms with his fear at the present time. The person must first of all think and convince himself of the fact that this fear is really ridiculous. Though it causes emotional tension, as a factor in itself, it is essentially absurd. Initially this is only on an intellectual level, but the suggestion will eventually infiltrate into the deeper realms of the mind. Realize that the environment is no different whether it is light or dark. Consider that most people are not afraid of the dark, so why should I have this fear? And so on. Remember this is only on an intellectual level, but the autosuggestion will help you very much to remove the phobia.

Autosuggestion can be applied to all types of consciously known problems. It is especially effective if applied during states of relaxation in the same way that we described desensitization. Therefore, autosuggestion is ideally practised after your yoga program or any method of systematic relaxation. You can also use autosuggestion before and after sleep. It is during times of relaxation that the mind is receptive to suggestion. Repeat the autosuggestion, perhaps in the example we have given: 'I am not afraid of the dark', with intensity for a few minutes or so. This will help bring about the required change. If done with little feeling or belief, or half-heartedly then it will fail to bring about the required results.

As we have already pointed out, the real problem lies buried deep in the recesses of the subconscious mind. In the case of fear of the dark, you may have had an unfortunate experience when you were very young. Perhaps you were locked in a small, dark cupboard when you were three years old. Whatever the cause of your phobia it lies in your mind. The best way to remove the phobia is to find the root and exhaust it through meditation practices. Of this there is no doubt. But autosuggestion is a useful and effective aid in initially overcoming the problem and should be used as much as possible. By injecting a new attitude into the mind concerning the object of fear, the old negative, crippling attitude is neutralized and rendered ineffective, inactive and powerless.

You can use autosuggestion to help combat all types of phobias, fears, complexes, conflicts, etc., once they are known.

Summary

We have given three techniques for cleaning the subconscious mind of its problems. If you have been practising yoga regularly then you will already be fully familiar with meditation practices. Desensitization and autosuggestion, however, are two new techniques. They are surprisingly simple to put into practice but they can bring wonderful results, given time and perseverance.

We emphasize that it is no good merely reading about these techniques and knowing them. They must be practised. So we urge you to persevere with meditation practices, and to supplement them with desensitization and autosuggestion where it is appropriate. The reader must decide for himself when and how they are used, for it is you who are facing your mind. If, however, you are unsure, perhaps a little confused or have strange experiences then seek the guidance of a teacher who has the experience and knowledge of meditation techniques.

Notes

- ¹ Removal of Mental Problems (Part 1) – Book I,
Lesson 9, Topic 2

Hatha Yoga: Sutra Neti

Sutra neti (nasal cleaning with thread) is an advanced process for cleaning the nose. It supplements and performs the same function as jala neti, namely it cleans and removes blockages in the nasal passages¹. In this way, free flow of air through both nostrils is achieved, this being so important for many yogic practices as well as general health.

In jala neti, salt water is used to clean the nose; in sutra neti a catheter (a long, thin rubber tube) or twined strands of cotton thread are passed through the nostrils.

Scriptural references

The ancient yogis had great respect for sutra neti and the benefits it bestowed on the practitioner. It is mentioned in various texts, the most descriptive of which is from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "Take soft cotton threads about one foot long and insert them through the nostril and out the mouth. The siddhas (accomplished yogis) call this neti. One should use a suitable thickness of twined strands (sutra), there being no hard and fast rule. In the practice one end of the sutra is put into one nostril, the other nostril is closed with the thumb or ring finger. Then do pooraka (inhale) through the nose and rechaka (exhale) slowly through the mouth. By doing this again and again the end of the sutra will enter the back of the mouth. Now hold the end that is in the mouth and the other end that is already outside and pull the sutra backwards and forwards.

"The alternative technique is to put one end in one of the nostrils, and closing the other nostril, do pooraka (inhalation). Then close the nostril containing the sutra and do rechaka (exhalation) through the other nostril. By doing this again and again the sutra will eventually come out of the second nostril. Now pull both ends of the sutra alternately. But very few persons can do this second method.

"Sutra neti purifies the kapala (frontal brain) and removes impurities from the nose. The

power of eyesight is increased and the eyes become bright."

The method described in this ancient text is quite difficult, especially the second form. Even if one could do them, a lot of time would be required, far more than most people of today have available. If you want to try the traditional methods then go ahead, but there are far easier techniques of attaining the same end. It is these modified methods that we will teach you in this topic.

Equipment

Two types of equipment may be used:

1. *A long, thin, rubber urethral catheter.* This can be purchased from almost any pharmacy for a very small sum of money. Catheters come in different sizes, which are assigned different numbers according to the outside diameter. The choice of the size of the catheter of course depends on the individual nasal passage, but sizes 4, 5 or 6 are generally suitable.

This is a modern improvisation which makes the performance of sutra neti much easier and quicker. However, the nasal passages are not cleaned as effectively as when the traditional cotton thread is used. Also, the final stage of sutra neti is virtually impossible if a catheter is used. However, the use of a catheter means little preparation is necessary for sutra neti, which makes it much more convenient than the use of cotton thread.

2. *A bundle of cotton threads* held together at each end with beeswax. The thread should be soft and of good quality. The method of preparation is as follows:

- Cut a number of strands of the thread to lengths of about forty-five centimetres or a little more. Cut enough so that the diameter of the strands of thread when held in a bundle is about three millimetres. Of course the diameter of the bundle should suit your nasal passages, but on your first attempt this width is sufficient.

- Heat some beeswax.
- Hold the end of the bundle of threads and trim the end so that all the individual ends are in line with each other. Twist the end of the bundle.
- Soak the first twelve centimetres of the trimmed twisted end in the hot beeswax and allow it to harden into a stiff but pliable cord.
- Trim the other end of the bundle of threads to the same length so that the total length of the cord is about forty-five centimetres. Twist the end for about ten centimetres and then soak in beeswax. Allow to harden.

The waxing of the other end is necessary for stage 3 of the practice. The cord (or sutra) is now ready for use. This preparation takes quite a long time and we recommend that a number of such cotton threads should be prepared when you have some spare time and stored in a clean box or tin.

Posture

Any comfortable sitting or standing position may be taken, though a squatting position (kagasana) is particularly suitable if it is comfortable².

SUTRA NETI

Stage 1

Either a catheter or cotton thread may be used for this stage.

Gently push the narrow end of the catheter or the waxed end of the cotton thread cord into the left nostril.

As you slowly push the sutra into the nostril, twist it so that it enters the nostril easily.

Don't under any circumstances use force; the interior of the nose is very delicate and any undue force could cause damage.

Eventually you should feel the end of the sutra emerging at the back of the throat.

With your index finger and thumb or your middle and index finger, whichever you prefer, reach into the throat and pull the end of the sutra out through the mouth.

This action may make you retch a little at first, but with practice it will cause absolutely no disturbance.



If you are using a cotton thread sutra, then the middle unwaxed portion should be in the nasal passages, with the waxed end emerging from your mouth and the other unwaxed end emerging from your nostril. If you are using a catheter, then one end will emerge from the mouth and the other end from your nostril. Hold each end of the sutra with the hands and gently pull the sutra backwards and forwards. If you feel any pain or discomfort, stop immediately.

Move the sutra to and fro no more than 35 times on your first attempt.

Release your hold on the unwaxed end, pull the waxed end and remove the sutra from your nose.

Stage 2

This stage is exactly the same as stage 1, but the sutra is passed into the other nostril and out of the mouth.

Stage 3

Only people using a cotton thread sutra can do this stage.

After completing stage 2, the sutra should be left so that it still passes through one of the nasal passages, one end emerging through the mouth and the other end emerging through one nostril.

Push the other waxed end of the sutra, from the nose, into the other nostril and pull the end through the mouth.

In this position, both waxed ends emerge from the mouth.

Loosen the hard wax at the last 5 cms of each end of the threads so that the individual strands of thread again become separated.

Point the two ends of the sutra towards each other and push the separate threads so that they merge with one another.

Then twist the sutra so that the two ends become joined.

If the joint is too thick, then some of the strands can be cut away; the joint should be sufficiently thin so that it can pass through the nostrils.

The sutra is now in the form of a circle.

Slowly draw the joint into the mouth, progressively sliding the sutra through the nostrils.

Eventually the joint should again be outside the body, but this time it will be located between the entrance to the two nostrils.

Disconnect the joint.

The sutra is now in such a position that it enters one nostril and emerges from the other – it no longer passes through the mouth.

Gently pull the sutra to and fro.

If there is the slightest discomfort, stop the practice immediately.

Only a few movements of the sutra are recommended during your first few times of practice, the number of times being slowly increased as you gain proficiency.

You should use your discretion in this respect. Then pull one end of the sutra and slowly withdraw it from the nose.

Duration, frequency and time of practice

If a catheter is used, stages 1 and 2 can be completed in a short time, much less than five minutes. If you use a cotton thread sutra, then stages 1, 2 and 3 can be completed in less than ten minutes. This of course does not include preparation which should be done at another time. Under no circumstances should the practice be hurried.

In each stage pull the sutra to and fro a suitable number of times. At first there may be a little uneasiness, for the nerves and mucus membranes will not be accustomed to the extra stimulation. If this is the case, slowly increase the number of movements of the sutra over a period of time, thus allowing the nerves and membranes to become more resistant and stronger. At first only a few movements (which should not cause discomfort) and certainly not more than fifteen times. With practice the number of movements can be increased to fifty.

This technique should not be done every day. Once every few days or every week is more than sufficient. The best time for practice is in the morning before breakfast; this is particularly relevant to those persons who tend to retch as they reach into the mouth to recover the end of the sutra.

Supplementary practice

After completing sutra neti one should then do jala neti¹, as this will flush out all the impurities and particles in the nose, including those that have been dislodged by performing sutra neti, and leave the nasal passages in the cleanest possible condition.

After performing both sutra and jala neti, the nasal passages may feel a little sore and

raw, and perhaps very dry. For this reason, it is a good idea to conclude your practice by doing either *dugdha neti* (neti with milk) or *ghrita neti* (neti with ghee). These are very simple techniques which merely involve introducing a few drops of milk or ghee (clarified butter) into the nasal passages. To do this, hold the head back and sniff the fluid into the nose from a suitable vessel. Remember only a small amount of milk or ghee is required; don't flood your nose. Ghrita or dugdha neti will temporarily replace the natural protective film of mucus in the nose that has been rubbed or washed away by sutra and jala neti. However, this practice is optional, for the body will manufacture and replace the old film with a new film, within a short period of time.

If the nostrils are particularly blocked prior to attempting sutra neti, then jala neti can be performed before sutra neti as well as afterwards.

Precautions

The nasal passages are extremely delicate; as such no undue force should be used to push the sutra through the nostrils. As you push the sutra into the nostril, it should be slowly twisted so that it more easily overcomes obstructions. If you find, even after persistent attempts, that you are unable to push the sutra into the nose, then seek expert advice from an experienced teacher.

Make sure that the sutra is clean before inserting it into the nostril. It is best not to try sutra neti until you can perform jala neti without difficulty.

Limitations

Persons who suffer from chronic haemorrhage (bleeding) of the nose should not do this practice without expert guidance.

Benefits

Sutra neti gives a frictional massage to the internal mucus membranes of the nose, strengthening the membranes, making them more efficient and more able to effectively condition (that is clean, moisten, disinfect and warm) the air that you breathe as it enters the nose prior to entering the lungs.

Sutra neti stimulates many of the large number of nerve endings in the nasal passages. This improves the innervation of the various

functions of the nose and their connections with the brain.

This stimulation also causes a slight irritation to the mucus membranes, resulting in an increased blood circulation in the nose which tends to encourage excessive secretion of mucus for a short period of time. This is very beneficial, for it removes any stagnation of blood in the nostrils and flushes out the secretory glands. The organs in the nose are consequently encouraged to function far more effectively. This includes the eyes, since the tear duct outlet in the nose and the blood supplies are closely connected.

Sutra neti is an excellent method of preventing colds or other inflammations of the nose, especially if it is supplemented with jala neti. The nasal passages are rendered more resistant to attack by germs or viruses.

The ideal combination is sutra neti performed in conjunction with jala neti. Jala neti removes the less ingrained obstructions and flushes out the nose, while sutra neti removes the more obstinate foreign bodies and dried up mucus deposits. It is for this reason that we highly recommend that jala neti be practised immediately after sutra neti to flush out all the particles in the nose and leave it in the cleanest possible condition.

The importance of stage 3

In stage 3 the sutra was arranged so that it emerged from both nostrils, crossing from one nostril to the next at the back of the nose. The flow of air through each nostril varies; sometimes the flow is greater through the left nostril and sometimes the flow is greater through the right nostril. Sometimes the flow through each nostril is equal and this is very important in yoga. Predominant air flow through the right nostril corresponds to extroversion and physical activity and flow of air predominantly through the left nostril represents introversion. When the flows are balanced, then this is conducive to higher awareness; one is neither lost in outside activities nor mentally brooding over problems or whatever. There is a balance and this balance is conducive to relaxation and receptivity in your whole being.

This balance in flows can only occur if both nostrils are unblocked and if the passage that links the two nostrils in the back of the nose

prior to entry into the throat is also unblocked. Stages 1 and 2 of sutra neti clean and remove obstructions in each individual nostril. Stage 3 also does this, but simultaneously it ensures that there is an unimpeded passage between the two nostrils inside the nose. Jala neti does the same thing of course, but not nearly as directly and effectively as sutra neti.

In particular, we recommend sutra neti as an excellent preparatory method for all types of pranayama techniques. For example, sutra neti will be most useful if done immediately before practising nadi shodhana pranayama. It will encourage the freest possible flow of breath through the alternate nostrils. The problem of course is time; if you have sufficient time then do sutra neti before practising pranayama, otherwise don't worry.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

Asanas: Practice

In an integrated asana practice program the back should be bent and stretched alternately backwards and forwards, and also given a twist in both directions. We have already introduced a number of asanas that adequately bend the spine backwards and forwards, but as yet we have only given one that twists the spine, namely meru wakrasana¹. This is a reasonably good asana, especially for people who have very stiff backs. If you have been practising meru wakrasana regularly then you should now be sufficiently supple to attempt the far superior asana – ardha matsyendrasana.

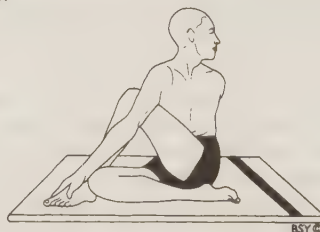
ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA (HALF SPINAL TWIST)

This asana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath, who is reputed to have performed meditation practices in the full form of this asana called matsyendrasana. This is one of the most difficult asanas in yoga, requiring a 'rubber body'. For this reason we will concern ourselves only with the easier half form of the asana at this stage. Later we will introduce the full form for those who have attained sufficient flexibility of body to attempt it without causing any injuries².

As a matter of interest, there is a well-known and fascinating story attached to yogi Matsyendranath in Hindu mythology. It is said that long ago Lord Shiva was teaching his wife Parvati the fundamental practices of yoga beside a river. The aim was that yoga would be brought out of its secrecy and disseminated throughout the world. In the river was a large fish and it listened to the lessons with rapt attention. Parvati noticed the fish and told Lord Shiva. Immediately Shiva transformed the fish into the form of man – no other than yogi Matsyendranath. Because of the knowledge that he had acquired by his attentive hearing of Shiva's discourses Matsyendranath was from then onwards regarded as the human

originator of yoga. It is said that all the yogic teachings that are now in existence have come from Matsyendranath, through his various disciples such as Gorakhnath. We leave the reader to accept or interpret this story in any way that he wishes.

Incidentally, the Sanskrit word *matsya* means 'fish', which explains how Matsyendranath and the asana which we will shortly discuss got their names.



Technique

Ardha matsyendrasana is not a difficult asana to perform, but unfortunately it is difficult to write about without becoming lost in a tangled description of arms and legs. Therefore, while we will try to make the description as simple as possible, we advise you to carefully study the accompanying picture while reading the instructions, and while actually attempting to physically perform the asana.

Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the floor with both legs stretched in front of the body.

Bend the right leg and place the right foot on the outside of the left knee.

Adjust the position of the right foot so that the sole is flat on the floor with the ankle in touch with the side of the left knee; the foot and toes should point forwards.

Place the left hand on the left side of the body; this will act as support for the next body adjustment.

While leaning on the left arm, fold the left leg backwards to the right.

Place the left heel so that it is in contact with the right buttock.

The legs should now be in the position as shown in the above figure.

Then slowly and gently twist the trunk to the right.

Place both hands on the floor on the right side of the body, making the arms straight.

Then try to grasp the right ankle with the left hand; don't strain.

The left arm should be adjusted so that it is straight and so that the back of the arm is in contact with the right knee and calf; the right knee should be as close as possible to the left armpit.

To take the position described it will be necessary to twist the trunk a little more to the right and to push the right thigh towards the abdomen.

The picture shows the position of the left arm very clearly.

If the left arm is in the correct location then you will feel that it acts as a lever against the right leg; this leverage automatically tends to twist the trunk even further to the right.

Place the right arm behind the back, pushing the hand either towards the top of the spine or towards the outside of the left thigh.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2: final position

Make the trunk as straight and vertical as is comfortable.

Relax the whole body, especially the back.

The back should remain totally passive throughout the entire execution of the asana.

Inhale deeply and then with exhalation slowly twist the trunk further to the right.

Remember that this torsion of the back should be applied by leveraging the left arm against the right leg; there is no reason to use the back muscles even slightly.

Try to twist the trunk as much as is comfortable, without strain.

Then turn the head in the same direction as the trunk so that you face over your shoulders.

This is the final pose.

Make sure that the trunk and head are upright and that the back muscles are relaxed.

Breathe slowly and as deeply as is comfortable. Stay in the final position for some time; then return to the starting position and straighten both legs.

Repeat stages 1 and 2 but twisting the body to the left.

Direction of twist

Many people make the mistake of twisting in the wrong direction. In other words, they place their right arm against the right leg or their left arm against the left leg. In this position there is no leverage. Under these circumstances, one thinks how easy the asana is to perform, which it is, but unfortunately it gives little or no benefits. The correct direction of twist is essential to obtain full benefits from the asana.

There is a very simple and direct method of quickly knowing if you have twisted the trunk in the correct direction. Imagine that the leg that points backwards, the one with the heel pressed against the buttock, is an arrow or a pointer. Your trunk must be twisted in the same direction as the arrow. In other words, in the final pose you should face in the direction that the arrow points. If this is not the case then you will definitely know that you are doing the asana incorrectly.

Points to remember

The reader should bear the following points in mind when practising the asana:

1. Do not sit on the heel; merely place the heel in contact with the side of the buttocks.
2. Make sure that the back is as passive as possible; this is important to obtain optimum benefits.
3. Do not try to twist the spine more than its flexibility will allow; with time and practice your muscles will become more supple and you will gradually find that you will be able to twist more and more.
4. In the final position the shoulders should remain at the same level.
5. Keep the back straight and upright in the final position.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale as you twist the body into the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position.

Your point of awareness will depend on whether the eyes are open or closed.

Eyes closed: be aware of breathing, or the eyebrow centre. When you become sufficiently proficient to remain in the final pose for some

time, then you can imagine that the breath is moving inwards and outwards at the eyebrow centre. As you breathe in feel the ingoing air piercing the eyebrow centre; as you breathe out feel the outflowing air being pushed out at the eyebrow centre. Your awareness should be on this process.

Eyes open: direct your gaze as far behind the back as possible, preferably fixing your attention on a point or spot on the wall.

Experiment and find out for yourself the method which you prefer. Keeping the eyes closed is more beneficial because it is more likely to concentrate the mind and also induce introspection. When the eyes are open there is more of a tendency for one's attention to wander over the objects in vision instead of remaining focussed on one point on the wall.

Beginners should only spend a few seconds in the final pose, if necessary alternately twisting the body three or four times on each side. This will loosen up the back. In fact, we advise beginners to stay in the final pose, hold their breath for a comfortable time, and then return to the starting position and repeat on the other side of the body. This procedure can be repeated a number of times.

When the back becomes more supple then start to gradually increase the duration of the final pose, while breathing slowly and deeply. This can be done over a period of weeks. Eventually you can spend a few minutes in the final pose in each direction of twist.

Sequence

Ardha matsyendrasana should be performed in every asana program if possible, after completing a sequence of forward and backward bending asanas. In this manner, the back is given the best possible exercise.

Furthermore, the back may be a little stiff after performing a number of backward and forward bending asanas. Ardha matsyendrasana brings about an almost instantaneous release of any tension. This is a good reason why it should be practised after most other asanas.

Limitations

People who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia or hyperthyroidism should not do ardha matsyendrasana unless under expert guidance. Women should not practise after two or three

months of pregnancy. People who suffer from sciatica or slipped disc may gain much benefit from this asana (many people have already done so in our experience), but you should be careful, especially if your case is severe.

Simpler technique for beginners

Those people who have very stiff backs have a lot of difficulty doing ardha matsyendrasana. Under these circumstances be careful not to use excessive force, or strain yourself, but you should either continue to practise meru wakrasana until your back becomes more flexible¹, or attempt the simpler form of ardha matsyendrasana that we will now describe:

Sit on the ground with both legs outstretched in front of the body.

Place your right leg in the same position as explained for ardha matsyendrasana.

Keep the left leg outstretched; don't bend it. Then repeat the rest of stage 1 and then stage 2 as described for ardha matsyendrasana.

All details are basically the same, and even though it is far easier, the benefits are nearly as good.

After some time when your back becomes looser, you should try to master ardha matsyendrasana.

Note: If you can nearly do ardha matsyendrasana, but still experience a little difficulty, then to make the asana easier to perform you can make the following adjustments: 1. Place the forward facing foot in front of the adjoining knee of the other leg. 2. Place the forward facing foot in contact with the inside surface of the forward facing knee, instead of the outside surface.

Again, when your back becomes more supple, revert to the position already described.

More advanced variation

If you find ardha matsyendrasana easy then you can try the following more difficult form: Adjust your body in the way explained in the first part of stage 1.

Instead of grasping your right ankle with your left hand, you should push your left hand and arm underneath the bent right leg, that is, the space between the calf and thigh of the right leg.

A little bit of adjustment may be necessary, but it is possible to reach backwards behind the back with the left hand.

Don't strain.

Fold your right arm behind the back in the way described in the basic technique.

Try to grasp the right and left hands behind the back.

We repeat, don't force, for this needs a reasonable degree of flexibility. If your back is sufficiently supple you may even find that you can grasp the wrist of one hand with the other hand.

Note: This variation gives greater leverage and therefore an accentuated twist of the back. For this reason the influence of the asana is enhanced. A further advantage of this variation is that it is more stable; therefore it is possible to remain in the final pose for longer periods of time compared to the basic form of ardha matsyendrasana.

Benefits

This asana acts predominantly on the abdomen and the spine, by applying a powerful torsion to the trunk of the body. When the trunk is twisted the muscles and nerves of the back and spine are contracted on one side, while the muscles and nerves on the other side are simultaneously stretched. When the trunk is twisted in the opposite direction then the process is the same but reversed. The overall result is an excellent alternate compression and extension of these nerves and muscles bringing them into the best possible condition. As with many other asanas, sluggish and stagnant blood is squeezed out of the spinal regions and encouraged to recirculate to the heart and lungs for purification, which also contributes much to bringing the spinal muscles and nerves into optimum health.

This torsion of the spine is useful for reducing the tendency of adjoining vertebrae to fuse together, this being most prevalent with elderly people.

Ardha matsyendrasana has been found beneficial in the treatment of backache, neckache and headache as well as general body stiffness. It helps to remove any tendency towards round shoulders and has been found useful by many people who have mild cases of sciatica and slipped disc. Remember also that the health of the body depends greatly on the condition of the spinal nerves, for these are the communication lines between the brain and body.

The organs in the abdomen are also alternately compressed and stretched, the compression being partly applied by the pressure of the thigh against the abdomen. This gives the organs a good massage, recirculates impure blood, and tones up the associated nerves. It has been found useful for helping to treat all manner of ailments, including diabetes, indigestion, rheumatism and constipation. In the case of constipation, it is important that the body is first of all twisted to the right, because faecal matter travels up the ascending colon along the transverse colon, and then downwards in the descending colon before being expelled from the body. Therefore an initial twist to the right followed by a left hand twist compresses the colon and activates the nerves associated with intestinal peristalsis in the same order as the progressive movement of faecal matter.

If this asana is done for long periods of time with awareness then it can bring about a wonderful sense of relaxation and easily lead to fruitful introspection. The fact that yogi Matsyendranath once practised inner yoga techniques in the full form of the asana is a good recommendation.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 36, Topic 3

Pranayama: Practice

Continue to regularly practise nadi shodhana pranayama in the manner previously described¹. We consider nadi shodhana a most important yogic technique. It is for this reason that we are devoting so much time to it. We could easily have described all the stages in one lesson, but this would not have encouraged you to practise it for yourself. It is when we slowly progress stage by stage as part of a sadhana, that there is more likelihood of actual practice on the part of the reader. And it is only by practice that you will gain benefits, instead of knowing the techniques merely as an acquired piece of knowledge. Furthermore, nadi shodhana cannot be perfected in a matter of days – many weeks and months are necessary. So if you have been practising regularly, we urge you to continue for the benefits will be great if you persevere. If you have not started or if your practice has been intermittent, then you should try to find time to practise regularly, even if it is only a few minutes every day. A little is better than nothing.

If you have mastered the ratio previously given, namely 1:4:2:1:4:2, then proceed to the following ratio 1:6:4:1:6:4 for inhalation: retention: exhalation: inhalation: retention: exhalation.

Under no circumstances should you strain. If you cannot manage to comfortably carry out the ratios we have given, then remain at the stage that is suitable for your personal capabilities.

Notes

¹ Nadi shodhana: Stage 3: Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4 and Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 4

Mudras: Bhoochari Mudra

Bhoochari mudra is an allied technique to agochari and shambhavi mudra and all three are excellent forms of *trataka*¹. Agochari and shambhavi mudras are often integrated with other yogic techniques or done specifically during one's yogic practice program. Bhoochari mudra on the other hand, though it can be done in your daily program, can easily be practised in everyday life. It can be done without other people realizing that you are practising a yogic technique.

It is an excellent, simple, yet effective practice that brings tranquillity and concentration of mind if done for a reasonable period of time with awareness.

Definition

The word *bhoo* means 'earth', and *chari* means 'moving' or 'dwelling'. As such we are not going to attempt a sensible, literal translation into English. We prefer to call this practice 'nothingness gazing'.

Posture

This mudra can be practised in any position and almost any place. You can do it while standing, sitting, lying, as you wish. You can do it in the privacy of your own house, at work or at play, whatever is convenient. However, if you practise at home in a sitting pose, it is best to face a blank wall. This ensures that there are no obstructions in your vision which can distract your attention from the practice. This is not essential, only preferable.

Preliminary procedure for beginners

Keep your eyes open.

Raise your right hand in front of your face.

Hold the palm so that it is flat and so that it faces downwards, with all the fingers together. Place the side of the thumb so that it is in contact with the top of the upper lip.

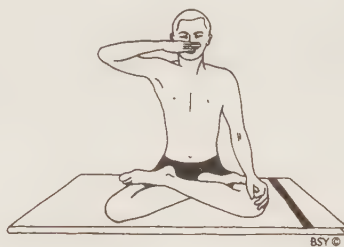
The elbow should point to the side of the body.

Focus your eyes on the tip of the little finger, which will be the furthest point of your hand from the eyes.

Gaze at the tip of the little finger intently for a minute or so, if possible without blinking or flickering the eyes.

If other thoughts arise let them but try to keep simultaneous and continuous awareness of the fingertip.

Then after a minute or so, remove your hand but continue to gaze at the space where the little finger was situated.



BHOOCHARI MUDRA
(NOTHINGNESS GAZING)

Beginners should practise the previous procedure. When they become more proficient they can leave it and start bhoochari mudra without any preliminaries.

Gaze intently at the nothingness in front of the face (where the little finger was positioned in the procedure for beginners).

Become fully engrossed in the nothingness – the empty space.

Be aware of other thoughts if they arise, but anchor your awareness to the nothingness at the same time.

Even if other things are occurring in front of the eyes, they should only be blurred.

In fact, if you are totally aware of the nothingness then you should not even notice them; even if your eyes see outer events there should be no registration of the fact in the field of conscious perception.

All you can see and are aware of is the nothingness; this is the aim.

From this will come calmness, introspection and concentration of mind.

Continue the practice for as long as you have time or circumstances will permit (perhaps during a bus ride, but don't miss your destination).

Time and place

Almost anytime and anywhere. It can be practised before meditation techniques if required though it is a meditation technique in its own right.

At first this simple practice is reasonably difficult for there are so many outer distractions that continually lure one's attention in other directions. As with every other yoga technique it is a matter of practice makes perfect.

Benefits

The benefits of doing this mudra are as already given for agochari and shambhavi mudra¹.

Notes

¹ Agochari mudra: Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5;
Shambhavi mudra: Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

Meditation: Trataka (Stage 3)

The previous two stages of trataka are concerned with first of all focussing one's attention on an external object, followed by the resulting after-image¹. The third stage of trataka which we will shortly describe, inner or antar trataka alone, is a more advanced technique. It can be either practised as a sequel to stage 2, or as a separate practice in its own right.

However, little benefit is likely to be gained from the practice if you have not already developed the ability to create and perceive a clear internal image at will. This can be done with or without an external and material counterpart. In order to help the reader decide whether or not to practise inner trataka by itself we suggest the following criteria:

1. If you cannot visualize and maintain a clear inner-image you should continue to practise trataka stage 1 or 2.
2. If you can hold a clear inner counterpart to an outer object and perhaps even produce an internal image at will, we suggest that you leave stage 2 and proceed to stage 3.
3. If you have plenty of time at your disposal then you can practise both stages 2 and 3, one after the other.

The important thing is that you don't attempt stage 3 without being able to fix your awareness on a clear inner-image. If you have a vague inner-image or even no image and you attempt to do stage 3 then you will either fall asleep or become enveloped in the usual patterns of thought play. In either case you will gain nothing in fact you will lose, for you will waste your valuable time. So use your discretion and choose the practice that is most suitable for your degree of proficiency.

TRATAKA – STAGE 3

In this form of trataka the attention is focussed only on an internal image. It is more difficult than outer trataka practised alone, or outer trataka combined with inner trataka¹.

Choice of image

This should be the same as the outer object that you have already chosen for trataka stages 1 and 2. If you are happy to visualize a candle flame then continue to do so. If you feel attraction for the symbol Aum then use this as your inner-image. The important thing is that you are able to internally visualize the object of your choice without too much effort.

Location of the eyebrow centre

Throughout the practice the inner image has to be visualized and projected at the eyebrow centre. This is far easier if one can feel some kind of sensation on the skin at that point. To attain this, lick one finger just prior to commencing the practice and apply a dot at the eyebrow centre. This will help to initially locate the correct position. However, though this method does help, the water will soon evaporate. For this reason it is far better to apply a little menthol, camphor or tiger balm, which will give a definite sensation at the eyebrow centre that will last throughout the entire duration of the practice. If the reader can think of a better alternative then that should be used instead.

Of course, if you can easily fix the position of the eyebrow centre then it is not necessary to adopt any means to produce a slight pressure or sensation.

Technique

For the purpose of description we will use a candle flame as the inner-image. There are 4 steps. Don't proceed to the next stage until you have achieved competency in the preceding stage.

Step 1: preparation

First of all sit in a comfortable position. Close your eyes, keeping them closed throughout the entire practice. Practise kaya sthairyam².

Be totally aware of the steadiness of the whole body. Feel that the body is unmoveable and fixed on the ground; a part of the ground. Continue to practise kaya sthairyam for a few minutes.

Become aware of the eyebrow centre (or bhrumadhya).

Without undue strain focus your attention on the sensation on the skin between the two eyebrows.

Try to think of nothing else but the eyebrow centre.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes, until you can feel a definite sensation at that point.

Then proceed to step 2.

Step 2: inner visualization

Try to visualize the flame of a candle at the eyebrow centre.

At first most people will find it difficult to see only a candle flame; these people should adopt the method that we have given at the end of this description or any other method that will help them to create a clear inner-image.

Try to hold the image at the eyebrow centre. If the image fades or disappears, don't worry but merely try to recreate it again.

Keep the image steady at the eyebrow centre. When the internal picture is steady and you have no difficulty creating a clearly defined image proceed to step 3.

Don't begin step 3 until you have mastered step 2, even though it may take a few days or weeks.

Step 3: breath awareness

Stare intently at the inner-image.

Then you have to be simultaneously aware of your breath.

Practise ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra³.

As you breathe in you should imagine that the flow of air is moving from the eyebrow centre backwards to the back of the head.

At the same time be aware of the sound of the breath caused by ujjayi pranayama.

As you breathe out you must try to feel that the air is moving forwards from the back of the head to the eyebrow centre.

Furthermore, you have to imagine and feel that the image is moving backwards and forwards.

As you inhale, feel the sound and backward movement of the breath and also the image being almost pulled backwards.

Then you exhale; be aware of the sound and the forward motion of the breath while feeling that the image is being almost pushed forwards. Try to do this with every breath.

At first it is difficult, but with practice it becomes easier and easier.

Eventually one feels in a sense that it is perfectly natural for the breath to move to and fro in the head.

Carry on in this manner for at least 10 minutes or more.

Step 4: looking into the image

Now leave ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra, together with awareness of the breath and the accompanying sound.

Now you have to investigate the nature of the image.

You must try to pierce through the exterior reality of the inner-image.

Look intently at the image and try to probe its shape and nature.

Gaze into the candle flame as though you are looking for something.

See the wick in the middle of the flame.

Try to gaze into the depths of the flame.

Feel and see the aura of the flame penetrating your mind.

Perceive as much detail as you are able.

Feel the collected rays of your awareness probing the flame in an attempt to discover its deeper significance.

What is the nature of the flame?

What is the deeper essence behind what you can see?

Continue in this manner for at least 5 or 10 minutes or until the end of the practice.

The longer you practise the better, especially if you have an exceptionally clear inner-image. Then release the image and be aware only of your eyebrow centre.

And when you are ready open your eyes.

Creation of an image

The most difficult part of this technique is the creation and visualization of the inner-image and then maintaining it for a prolonged period of time at the eyebrow centre. The following is a method which may be useful as an aid in creating the inner-image.

Close your eyes.

Imagine you are doing outer trataka.

See a mental picture of the whole candle, the flame and even the desk or stool on which it is placed.

If necessary you can even visualize a mental picture of yourself sitting in front of the candle. When you have a reasonably clear visualization, slowly reduce the field of the picture by gradually moving towards the flame. Continue until you can only see the candle and the flame.

This is a suitable inner-image for antar trataka.

Note: Many people find that this is an easier method of creating the object of awareness in inner trataka. Of course you can use the same procedure for any other object that you care to choose, especially if you have previously practised outer trataka over a period of weeks. Once you can easily visualize the inner-image you must be able to hold it at the eyebrow centre. This takes some practice but ability slowly develops if you persevere over a few days and weeks.

Duration

Try to practise for at least half an hour if not more.

Benefits

The benefits are as enumerated for trataka stage 1, though far more accentuated¹.

Under normal waking conditions of life we are subjected to a continuous stream of sensory data from the outside world. Added to this are the multitudes of thoughts that arise from our subconscious mind, many in response to negative emotions and reactions to inner and external events. Because of this, the enormous power and potential of the mind is not used. Instead the mind operates at a very low level compared to its fullest potential. Its energy is dissipated in all directions. Trataka cuts off this continual bombardment of the mind by centring the attention or field of awareness at one point. In this way, we are able to become aware of the potential of the mind, for it spontaneously shows itself under these ideal conditions of concentration. Furthermore, trataka is a method of consolidating the power of the mind, so that it can be directed towards some useful end, whether material, mental or spiritual.

Incorporation into Trataka – stage 2

The method that we have just described can also be easily and effectively combined with trataka stage 2. In fact, those who wish can gain great benefit from this combination, especially those who have difficulty in creating a clear inner-image. In particular the process of 'looking into' described in step 4 can be adapted for use in outer trataka. We leave the reader to choose his or her own system of combination.

Notes

¹ Trataka: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6
Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have given more tangible methods of rooting out mental problems. That is, meditation techniques in general, desensitization and autosuggestion. These practices are intended for practical application not merely for accumulated knowledge, so we strongly urge you to put them into practice. If you do this, wonderful changes can occur in your life.

Try to do sutra neti together with jala neti¹; once a week is ideal, perhaps on the weekend when there is more spare time available.

Practise bhoochari mudra when you find that you have nothing to occupy your attention

for some time. Instead of reading the newspaper try bhoochari mudra – it is far more restful.

If you find you need more time for yoga practices, make sincere attempts at rising half an hour earlier in the morning. This is important so that you can start to seriously practise meditation techniques such as trataka.

Continue the practices of trataka and pranayama as described in this lesson.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	2
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	10
Bhoochari Mudra	—	9
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	4
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	10
Bhoochari Mudra	—	5
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	20
		60

Program 3: duration ¾ hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	2
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	5
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	18
		45

Program 4: duration ½ hour for physical fitness

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	5
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:		
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	5
		30

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Lesson 11

When the three bandhas (jalandhara, uddiyana and moola bandha) are well perfected the rechaka and pooraka (inhalation and exhalation) do not function, the flow of senses gets purified and kevala kumbhaka takes place. Therefore experience the vidya (pure knowledge) in the form of kevala kumbhaka.

One should practise the above while fixing the mind in the anahata chakra with total awareness, until at last the breath and the mind become motionless. It is then and there that the spontaneous kumbhaka known as kevala kumbhaka is experienced.

There are innumerable varieties of kumbhakas described in hatha yogic tradition, but none can equal the kevala kumbhaka, because in no other kumbhaka does the prana become steady.

—Adishankaracharya, *Yogataravali* (8–10)

Removal of Mental Problems (Part 3)

Strangely enough, many people regard anxiety or mental dissatisfaction as the first step, as the prelude to seeking higher awareness or spiritual life. Actually there is a lot of truth in this belief, for it is only when one feels discontentment, emptiness and unhappiness that one seriously starts to look for something more meaningful in life. Often anxiety in the form of uncertainty of human existence is the driving or motivating force which impels people to seek higher states of consciousness, and eventually enlightenment. Without some form of anxiety, each person complacently wallows in the insecure world of ignorance. For most people, dissatisfaction is the incentive to try to find out the 'truth', if indeed it exists in the first place. Other people tread the path to higher awareness for a different reason, perhaps to remove physical problems, to develop greater self-control or whatever. But actually the cause is basically the same, namely dissatisfaction with the present conditions, the status quo, and aspiration towards something more. So in this sense mental disturbances can be considered in a positive manner as the motivating force that actually makes people leave their habitual patterns and seek new means of expression and a more joyous and knowledgeable way of life.

So your unhappiness or dissatisfaction, even if it is only a slight murmur in the background and hardly heard above the din and turmoil of daily life, is in a way doing you a favour. It is giving you a kick or a jolt out of habituated routines and patterns of thought and giving you the incentive to direct your interest elsewhere. Most people drain away their energy and interest in excessive worldly pursuits. It is totally squandered when at least some of it could be channelled and used in more positive directions and by this we mean inner exploration and development. We certainly don't say that you should not act in the world, for this is part of life. You must

act your role on the world stage to the best of your ability, but at the same time each person should channel some of his or her energy towards the internal world. Half an hour of yoga practices every day is a beginning and is the way for you to directly contact your inner dormant potential and resources.

It is overindulgence in the blind drives of everyday life that prevent you turning your attention inside and realizing the incredible depths of your being. It is only when things start to go wrong in your relationship with the outer environment, or when you seek something more, that you seriously begin to think about exploring yourself. Even though your problems may cause you much anguish, in a way they are your best friends, for they will force you, push you to find new levels of experience that are at present completely beyond your comprehension. They will impel you to seek realms of being that are now totally unimaginable. We don't say impossible, for if something is impossible it is still imaginable; we mean levels that are beyond the impossible because they are beyond present concepts.

Therefore you should devote some time every day to introspection, leaving aside if possible all the responsibilities, cares and interests of day to day life. During this time try to find the deeper problems that make your outer life unhappy and eventually discover experiences that the mystics have endlessly talked about. To merely try to introspect during yoga practices is not easy, for you are conditioned to continually escape back into the everyday worries and interests, instead of facing yourself. But with practice and perseverance you will be able to relax more and gradually eliminate the subconscious problems and then really tap your inner resources. All that is needed is effort, perseverance and aspiration. During meditation practices, you will probably find it impossible to sit in one place for

more than a few minutes, without feeling the strong impulse to get up and do something. You have been trained and habituated since birth to be doing something. Persevere and these tendencies will subside. Gradually you will overcome your habitual tendency to lose yourself in an everlasting stream of outside activities and pursuits. Slowly but surely, you will confront yourself, your inner drives and eventually arrive at a deeper understanding of your incredible, real nature. But first you must confront your subconscious problems. You must first cross the river, and perhaps get wet before you reach the other side. You must first of all pass through, experience and expel your mental problems, before you can know peace, joy and knowledge. You have to pass through hell before you can reach heaven.

Helping the world situation by helping yourself

Ramana Maharshi was once asked how one could most effectively start to help the world and create a more harmonious and peaceful brotherhood of man. Ramana Maharshi told him that he must first of all change himself and that this approach is the most positive step that anyone can take to contribute towards increasing world harmony. Whether the questioner accepted the answer or even understood it is uncertain. Perhaps he thought it a selfish attitude. But as far as we are concerned Ramana Maharshi's reply was perfect. He knew what people have failed to see throughout the ages and today, that the way to improve the condition of the world as a whole is to first of all improve the condition of oneself. This is not egoism, but common sense, for how can someone really hope to positively contribute to the improvement of the world situation if he is in a sad situation himself. It is almost like a person who emanates unhappiness and who is continuously scowling trying to preach to others what the joy of happiness is all about. There is no impact and no influence, for there is total hypocrisy in the act. One can only spread peaceful vibrations in the world if one individually radiates peacefulness. This is the only way. To solve other people's problems you must first of all solve your own.

We see the unstable world situation as a large mental problem, the sum total of the

population of individual mental problems. The humanized world is unstable because most of the people in it are unstable. So by trying to solve your mental problems you are making a positive step not only to bring happiness to yourself but to the whole world. The more you harmonize yourself, the more you will act as a beacon of harmony and peace to the world. You will be giving your most valuable contribution to your environment by sorting out your own problems. This preoccupation with your own mind is neither antisocial nor escapism. It is the way to offer the most important offering you can to the world at large. There is a further factor: namely, that the more you solve your conflicts and know yourself the more you will automatically want to help others. You will have no choice – it will arise spontaneously together with love of your fellow man, no matter how grotesque he may often seem.

The following is a very apt, sharp and eloquent summary of the world situation given by Robert Linssen in the book entitled *Living Zen*: "Humanity could be compared to two and a half thousand million greyhounds rushing in pursuit of a mechanical hare on a racetrack. These human greyhounds are taut, overtense, avid and violent, but Zen (yoga) tries to teach them that what they think is a real hare is only a mechanical hoax. The moment man fully realizes what is implied by this truth he 'lets go' and the bitterness of his struggles and violence are succeeded by relaxation, peace, harmony and love.

"The consequences of such a release are immense, not only for the physical, nervous and mental health of a man as an individual, but also for humanity as a whole."

Crisis during the mind cleansing process

As you start to purge the dross in the subconscious mind, you may possibly go through periods of nervous, emotional and mental troubles. There may even be occasional eruptions, in the form of various illnesses in the body. This is, in fact, to be expected, for problems have to manifest themselves before they can be exhausted. Perhaps you won't pass through these minor crises; it depends on your problems. But if you do face them, remember that they are no more than a passing phase, a temporary reaction, and that when you pass

through the cloud you will feel much lighter and greatly relieved.

You may initially experience more illnesses than normally, such as colds etc. Again this is a readjustment reflected in the body due to the inner change brought about by the mental cleaning. Don't worry, for eventually your health in every way will undergo a miraculous improvement for the better. You will perhaps go through wonderful periods of elation followed by periods of depression. You will reach heights and then drop into the depths. Eventually, however, this wide fluctuation will disappear and you will become more and more stabilized. You might become very sensitive to other people and detect subtle insinuations etc., maybe of a derogatory nature. Gradually, however, you will become stronger and more tolerant of other people's bitterness and criticism. You will start to understand why they act in the way that they do and they will cause you no further upset. Sensitivity will grow together with mental strength.

We have warned you of difficulties so that you are prepared for them. It is more than a possibility that your progress will be smooth and without any bumps. More than likely you will experience far less unhappiness and emotional upsets than you already experience at present. It depends on the individual. If, however, you feel that the experiences that you have are too overwhelming, then seek the guidance of a competent and experienced yoga teacher or any other person who has been through the path that you are currently going through.

One thing we assure you of is that any traumas you may pass through are more than compensated by the change that will actually take place in your being as you progress. You will slowly merge into a state of joy, serenity, knowledge and understanding. You will radiate these qualities like the sun radiates light. This is the subject of the next heading.

The mind as a perfect reflector

The aim of cleaning out the personal mind of its accumulated dross and removing inner turmoil is to transform it into a perfect instrument of perception and also to make it a perfect analyzer of data and a perfect instrument for translating thoughts into action. This of course takes time, but the following

description is intended to give you an idea, though inadequate and incomplete, of how the personal mind should work if it is not clogged with defects.

One will be in a continual state of meditation, whether sleeping, eating, working or whatever. There will be no feelings of anxiety under any situation. The normal and obsessive ego-centred drives or self-interests will disappear. One will automatically understand others and feel more for them. They will be seen in a new light. The fragmented and opposing attitudes and opinions of individuals will no longer seem contradictory, but will supplement each other and merge together in harmony. One will start to see oneness, unity, perfection and concord, instead of individuality, separateness, differences, imperfections and discord. Outer events will be clearly perceived, but without the usual negative and adverse repercussions. External impressions will seem to flow into the mind, be smoothly absorbed, digested and answers will occur spontaneously and flow out of the mind. There will be no conflict, blocking or effort; no mental constipation. Things will just happen. Everything will run as it should, without the usual accompanying hustle and bustle. Each reaction will be perfectly appropriate to the given situation. The external events will be the same, but one's relationship to them will be totally different. Instead of being continually upset by the ups and downs of life, one will glide through them with a feeling of joy. Ideas that were previously seen to be mutually exclusive, irreconcilable or antagonistic are seen to be part of a whole and really in unison with each other. Each philosophy or belief is seen to be partially true and no more than an incomplete explanation of something that is beyond words and conceptions. Each creed or set of concepts is seen to be applicable at a particular level of awareness and understanding.

One will live in the eternal now with total absorption. A mind devoid of problems automatically fixes itself on the work at hand. It is not disturbed or distracted elsewhere. There is perfect concentration. No effort is necessary. Efficiency and perfection are the natural outcome. Worry, fear, anger, depression, jealousy no longer interfere with concentration or total living of life. Work and play become one; there ceases to be

differentiation between them. The common feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction, unhappiness melt away as though they never existed and as though they are totally unnatural. Even the usual oppressive and melancholy fear of death or illness will cease, for these will be seen in a new and higher light of understanding.

One will continue to perform one's duties, not less enthusiastically as one would expect, but more enthusiastically, joyfully and zestfully. Tension is widely felt to be a spur, a stimulus to prod or goad people into activity. Well it is, no doubt of this, but it is a very ineffective and limited one. A calm, tensionless mind leads, contrary to common supposition, to a person who is a human dynamo, throbbing with vitality and enthusiasm. One does not languish in a state of indifferent laziness, because of lack of mental tension. One starts to live life to the full, undergoing a veritable rebirth. One interacts with other people and situations with totality, whether in excitement, anger, love and all other human expressions. But all these emotions no longer influence the inner being as they did before. The experience of life is heightened, contrary to popular conceptions of the higher stages of yoga. The freer the mind is of problems, the greater the ability to enjoy and experience life to the full.

Everything is seen as being basically friendly, even worst enemies. As such, the mind is no longer bombarded with negative, mentally disturbing vibrations. Instead, one becomes a generator of good will, friendliness, power and knowledge. Instead of feeling crushing and oppressive loneliness, as most people do, one feels and knows an intimate relationship with everything, feeling the oneness in a far deeper sense than can ever be conveyed in words. Instead of enduring the feeling of alienation and isolation, a small cog in a big wheel, one will know and feel one's incredible relationship, significance and importance in the scheme of existence. How can one possibly feel mental or emotional upsets under these circumstances? It is impossible, for one will relate to and experience everything in a new and wonderfully clear light, glowing with joy instead of being pale and tarnished with dejection.

This long description has been given not to impress you or to fill up these pages, but to show you that removing your mental problems

will have vast implications and repercussions on your life. Of course, the experiences we have described will happen in the future, but it is possible for you, and anyone else who cares to make the effort to explore the mind, to know and understand it. All that is required is effort – nothing more. It sounds simple, but continual perseverance and effort will be necessary. But once you begin to spring-clean the mind, then you can only benefit; by becoming more aware you will be able to tune in with higher knowledge. The choice is yours. Either polish the reflecting surface of your mind or allow it to remain disordered and unable to reflect or receive that which is beyond.

TECHNIQUES

Previously we said that we considered conditioning as a mental problem, in fact one of the main causes of misery in life¹. This is a point that we cannot emphasize enough. For this reason our first topic is concerned with deconditioning.

1. Deconditioning

Yoga aims to slowly remove fixed and rigid habits, dogmas and conditioning, so that the individual is adaptable to new situations and perfectly receptive to new experiences. Most people live a robot, automated existence with stereotyped responses to situations and people. There is absolutely no spontaneity. Since birth we have been conditioned and trained to act in fixed and automatic ways to given situations. We are like Pavlov's dogs: ring a bell and we begin to salivate. This may seem a little exaggerated, well perhaps it is, but we are trying to convince you of how most people lack freedom and spontaneity in their actions. Look around you at the activities of others, or even better, look at your own actions. You will find that many of them are deeply ingrained habits. And these are only the obvious ones.

It is a fact that the more aware one becomes, the less habitual one becomes. A peaceful, trouble free and deconditioned mind has incredible powers of clarity, perception, decision, that can adapt itself to any situation. Furthermore, a deconditioned mind responds perfectly to a given situation, and the forth-

coming actions are those that are relevant to the circumstances. There is tremendous agility and flexibility of mind. Whereas a conditioned mind will respond according to its own limited dream world interpretation of the situation, or according to its habitual programmed response. The resulting action is very rarely the best possible in view of the circumstances.

There is a wonderful example of conditioning given in Zen Buddhism. The master asked his disciple a question. When the disciple answered, the master was satisfied. On another day the master asked the same disciple exactly the same question. The disciple remonstrated that he had previously been asked the same question. The master acknowledged this fact, but nevertheless, asked the disciple to answer his question again. The disciple duly did this, giving exactly the same answer as he had before. The master became very angry and the disciple could not understand this, so he asked the master why he was pleased on the first occasion and yet angry on the second occasion, even though the answer was the same. The master explained that every moment in life is a different situation and therefore if one is truly spontaneous one will respond according to the new situation. The disciple had frozen and merely reproduced a stereotyped answer from past memory. He was not living in the present, but was following the dictates of his conditioning.

How does a man become conditioned? The answer is simple. Since childhood one learns to react to outside impulses in a certain manner. This results in a certain physical action, speech, mental activity, etc. When the actions are repeated over and over again then they become habit and one becomes conditioned. The more we accumulate these habits, the more rigid and automatic our life becomes. Instead of responding spontaneously, we become a walking robot that does whatever it is programmed to do with little relationship or consideration of the life situations as they really are. One lives in one's own little dream world. Swami Sivananda has summed up this process perfectly in the following poem:

*Sow a thought and reap an action.
Sow an action and reap a habit.
Sow a habit and reap a character.
Sow a character and reap a destiny.*

There are some people who believe that our entire life is totally conditioned by our personality and that there is little we can do about it. Actually this is true, but only at low levels of awareness. The more aware one becomes the less one is conditioned. The great saints, sages and yogis were definitely not conditioned, for they are living in and experiencing that which is beyond conditioning. They live in the realms where destiny and free will have no meaning. Anyone who tries to predict the actions and reactions of a person in higher consciousness is in for a great surprise. His actions and responses are unpredictable. The reason is very simple – they are not conditioned in the way that most people normally are. If you ask him a question, the answer will more than likely be unexpected. Ask another person and you will probably know beforehand exactly what they will answer. Feed in the outer impression and the automatic response will result. Most people are conditioned by ingrained and deep-rooted habits of thought and action.

How can one start to eliminate this conditioning? The answer is through yoga; in fact, one of the main purposes of yoga is to dissolve conditioning so that one becomes a spontaneous and receptive human. Remember, by spontaneity we don't mean automatic reactions; we mean perfect perception and receptivity to the environment, inner and outer, so that when one performs actions they are in complete harmony with everything around and within and beyond. Remember also that it is impossible to either force or create spontaneity; it can only happen as a natural consequence of a free and uninhibited mind. By practising meditation, the conditioning and habits will slowly but surely be expelled. The mind will be slowly reverted to its original and normal function, namely a perfect reflector.

There are further methods. While acting in daily life try to reflect on your actions. When you perform an action or think in a certain way, ask yourself why you acted in that particular manner. Is the action a conditioned response, without relevance to the given situation? Once you begin to recognize your conditioning you will unconsciously start to take steps to remove it. Recognition is the important thing. Most people don't realize that they are acting like robots. The

same is with all your beliefs. Question them realistically. "Are they valid, or am I holding on to those beliefs without any real conviction or reason? I have the belief that all people who leave doors open are idiots. Why do I have such a belief?" It is the same with all our desires. "Why do I have such a strong desire to eat five bars of chocolate every day? Why do I take such great pains to impress my neighbours?" The list is endless and you must consider the question yourself. But reflection is important for the process of deconditioning the mind of habituated actions and patterns of thought. Don't suppress your actions under any circumstances but at least try to recognize them and reflect on them.

At first you will notice little effect on your life, yet slowly but surely you will feel a great sense of freedom in your activities. The more the mind is emptied not only of conditioning but all types of problems (though these are really no more than forms of conditioning) the more aware you will become. If one has a higher experience, even for a few seconds, then this taste will act as a wonderful incentive and dispeller of conditioning. Personal experience is the best way of removing conditioning. But for the mind to have these experiences of higher knowledge it must first become less clouded with limited patterns of thought. Meditation practices, reflection and any other method you think suitable will help to decondition your mind. Notice that we did not say recondition, for that would be replacing the existing patterns in your mind with another cloud or set of limitations. And this is totally defeating the aim. It is not necessary to add anything to your mind, only empty it of the mental disturbances and conditioning that are obscuring its clarity. What you seek is already there; all you have to do is to clear the mind sufficiently to contact it and know it.

2. Disidentification

Simultaneous with the removal of mental problems, the mind must be made stronger and less vulnerable to outside impressions and crises. It must be strengthened so that adverse, outside events no longer disturb its functioning. Of course, as the mind becomes progressively emptied of its problems, then automatically it will become more resistant to external influences. However, there is

another excellent method of bringing this about called detachment. It does not mean that one becomes like a vegetable and avoids the ups and downs of life or refrains from interpersonal relationships. No, not at all. It means that though one reacts and acts out external roles, activities and feelings of life, love, hate, anger, etc., they should be seen as something outside oneself. These external activities should not be allowed to affect you in a deeper sense. You must be aware of them as though you are a witness.

In life you must be like a rubber ball, and not like a glass ball. Most people are like a fragile glass ball; they crack, shatter or go to pieces every time they are bounced by a difficult life situation. Become like a rubber ball: resilient, so that everything that happens to you has no deeper influence. Though you will face difficult situations and crises, they should not affect you or upset your inner self, but only in a superficial sense. If you throw a rubber ball on the ground it will rebound without any detrimental change on its inner composition. You must be like this rubber ball, resilient, yet strong, flexible in all situations, and yet without allowing the play of life to touch the inner core of your being. This may be easier said than done, but the method of watching life situations as though they are something different to yourself is a great aid. It is only a technique to gain inner stability, nothing more.

You must try to disidentify yourself as much as possible with your body, emotions and mind. Be aware of everything that happens. Act like a witness, only without identifying yourself with anything. Overidentification with the body, emotions and mind will lead to painful and undesirable physical, emotional and mental experiences. You must try to watch all activities from the centre of consciousness. In this way sorrowful events of life and any other events will not leave a mark on your being. They will occur as though they are something different and apart from your being. The ripples and waves will disturb the surface of the lake, but leave the depths still, calm and undisturbed. Though it is difficult, one must aim to be aware, as an observer under all circumstances, including even the most tumultuous, agitated or disturbing conditions. It can be done quite easily during

asanas, pranayama, etc. but during everyday activities effort and practice are required.

As we have already pointed out much unhappiness in life is the result of overidentification with the body, emotions and the mind. The same applies to overidentification with your work, or your role in life. A process of disidentification is necessary, as a method of obtaining tranquillity in life.

It is a strange thing that if people are asked what they are, they will usually reply "I am an engineer" or "I am a doctor" or "I am a secretary" or perhaps "I am a housewife." They will answer according to what they identify with in life, what their role, work or preoccupation is in life. Some may answer that they are a combination of things – perhaps a mother, a wife and a secretary during the daytime. Yet these things are not what they really are, but only a statement of what they do.

Let us take an example to show how this identification can lead to unhappiness and mental disturbances. Consider an actor. He totally identifies himself with his role as an actor: a fine physique, features, an engaging personality and a manly and melodious voice. He takes great care to keep himself in good condition, in keeping with his role. He may even practise exercises as a means of staying in good shape. Yet, inevitably, nature takes its course and as the years pass he will notice clearly that his youthfulness is disappearing. He painfully realizes that he is losing his distinctive actor's features. His physical condition declines, his face loses its freshness, his voice will lose its depth. He will probably look at himself in the mirror every day, perhaps for hours on end, becoming despondent and may even take futile steps to check or counteract the decline by taking a facelift etc. He will become depressed, for his conception of himself is fast disappearing in front of his very eyes. He may even think of suicide or have an emotional breakdown. His overidentification with his youthful, handsome physical appearance is rebounding causing him deep unhappiness and despair.

This is an extreme example. In fact, this is the reason that we chose it as an illustration. But the reader must agree that there is a lot of truth in what has been said, if one considers the number of actors and actresses that have in fact committed suicide. Yet this over-

identification applies in almost every person's life. Consider a mother. She identifies with her role; she sees herself only as a mother, nothing else. Yet eventually her children will probably leave home as young birds will leave the nest. If she has totally identified with her role of mother, then she will suffer much unhappiness. It is the same with all roles that one assumes in life; if one overidentifies with them, then they will definitely cause anguish and emotional upset when the role finishes or changes.

Identification with the body, emotions and the mind is so common that one rarely or never questions its validity. One says, "I am thirsty" when what one really means is "the body is thirsty". The 'I' is overidentified with the body. One says "I am angry" or "I am depressed," when it is really the emotional system that feels these things. One says "I think that two plus two equals four," but actually it is the rational sphere of the mind that thinks. And so on. Although these identifications are involved with limitations of language, it is still obvious that we clearly overidentify with functions of ourselves, and not the real 'I'. We are not asking you to change your way of speaking, only that you realize that you are continually creating false identifications. Though you are forced by the construction of our language to continually state these identifications, in a deeper sense don't associate yourself with them.

It is possible to distinctly watch the activities of the body, emotions and mind as a spectator. If you have never experienced this then you have missed something that is very revealing. There is something more permanent that is observing. The body, emotions and the mind are merely instruments of something deeper, and they are certainly not the real 'I'. It is that which witnesses that is the 'I'. It is this that one should identify with. If you can do this then your body and mind will function more efficiently, unhampered by prejudices, fears, etc. You will attain wonderful physical and mental health.

Therefore, if you want to gain more relaxation and flow with the current of life, without being in a continual state of strife with the impressions of the environment, then you must realize that your roles in life are only actions. Nothing more. They are not

you. You must continue to do them, but look at them realistically. Consider yourself as an actor performing the roles. Your deeper self or nature will be the audience, while the body and mind will carry out the roles.

Next, you must try to disidentify with your body, emotions and personal mind. You should be aware of them. This is not easy and at first will only be intellectual, but with practice you will find that you identify with them less and less. This is not surprising for the witness is consciousness. You are not creating anything, merely allowing that which is already there to reassert itself in your being.

Conclusion

There are a large number of techniques for cleaning out the mind and inducing tranquility. In psychiatry there are methods such as initiated symbol projection, dream interpretation, picture association, narco-analysis, etc. We have given the ones that we think are most practical and effective. Don't make the mistake of thinking that the subject of cleaning out the mind is finished, for the whole aim of yoga is directed towards this very end.

In the first part, we mentioned the basic problem of lack of meaning in life¹. This is a problem that will certainly dissolve and disappear in the course of making progress in yoga. But you must find this out for yourself and not take our word for it. There is another factor. We strongly advise you to follow your own aspiration in life. As much as possible express your talent through work or play – artistic, organizational, etc., as this also helps to eliminate mental strife, for one becomes caught in a flow of concentrated activity. If you are flowing with the current then you are not concerned with the eddy currents or obstruction at the river's edge.

In fact, we see external expression as a necessary part of exhausting mental problems and of yogic life in general. But as much as possible it should be karma yoga, selfless action, so that one does not become too ego-centred and self-preoccupied².

Man, both in the past and in present times, has devoted most of his attention to mastering outer events, caring little for the inner events. This is the reason he has so many problems, for there has to be knowledge of the inner environment to achieve peace of mind and

higher awareness. There has to be a progressive movement towards harmony, both in the internal and external worlds. Internal problems must be progressively erased from the subconscious mind. Any higher experiences will hasten this process until one wipes the accumulated 'dust' of past conditioning and impediments from the mind. Then you will know what Christ meant when he talked about: 'the peace that passeth understanding'.

Notes

¹ Removal of mental problems: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2; Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Laghoo Shankhaprakshalana

An intestinal system which is permanently overloaded and blocked brings about adverse, disagreeable and dampening consequences on a person's life¹. If you suffer, or have previously suffered from constipation, then there is no need to convince you of its negative repercussions; you would already know from your own bitter experience. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is an excellent, yet simple, method of encouraging a good bowel movement, and for generally washing out the intestines. It is particularly useful for people who suffer from constipation, though it can also be used to thoroughly flush out the digestive system. It can be done daily as part of your early morning routine, or it can be performed occasionally whenever it is justified. The practice only takes a few minutes to carry out, yet this short time is usefully spent, for the practice will help you to remove torpor and dullness from your life, and to replace it with energy, interest and optimism.

Terminology

The Sanskrit word *laghoo* means 'short', 'condensed' or 'concise'. The word *shankha* means 'conch' or 'shell' and *prakshalana* means 'to wash' or 'to clean thoroughly'. The word shankha is intended to represent and describe the intestine, with its cavernous and coiled shape. Therefore, the combined term *shankhaprakshalana* means to completely wash the intestines. This is, in fact, the name of a more comprehensive technique².

The method we will describe here is the shortened form – laghoo shankhaprakshalana – which can be done very quickly and with little preparation. Furthermore, the two practices have slightly different purposes: shankhaprakshalana is intended to completely empty and clean the whole digestive system, whereas laghoo shankhaprakshalana is intended only to encourage normal functioning of the intestines.

Advantages over laxatives

Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is not intended to act in the same way as laxatives. Laxatives artificially stimulate the nerves of the intestines, so that peristalsis (the wave-like motion in the intestines) is prompted to rapidly propel the stool through the intestines to the bowels for expulsion. Although this does empty out the bowels, at the same time it leads to gradual weakening of the nerve reflexes. Furthermore, laxatives tend to completely empty the bowels and this is not nature's intention. In a healthy intestinal system there is always a residue of stool in the bowels. It is here that water is reabsorbed into the body to prevent dehydration. Moreover, this residual stool contains myriads of bacteria, which help to protect the body from infection and also help to produce certain vitamins of the B complex. Strong laxatives sweep out all the stool, thereby preventing reabsorption of water, and preventing the bacteria from performing its normal function. Therefore, though laxatives give short-term benefits, they can lead to gradual deleterious effects in the body.

In laghoo shankhaprakshalana, salt water is used, not a laxative. The salt water acts as a lubricant and loosens up the stool. Let us take an analogy. If you have engrained crust, stains or coating on the inside of a pot, you first of all let it soak for some time in hot water. This loosens up the encrustation and eventually allows it to be easily removed. The salt water acts in a similar way within the intestines leaving them clean and free from obstruction.

The salt water does not directly stimulate the nerves. Normally, it is movement and bulk of stool that acts as a trigger which, in turn, stimulates the nerves which activate peristalsis. The salt water encourages the hardened or blocked stool to move, which prompts the nerves to carry out their normal functions. No direct nerve stimulation is involved as is the case with laxatives. A further point worth

noting is that the salt water does not in itself lead to complete evacuation of the bowels, which is one of the major drawbacks associated with laxatives. If you are currently using some form of laxative, we suggest you adopt laghoo shankhaprakshalana in order to reduce this dependency.

Equipment

All that is required is a pitcher of lukewarm salt water and a glass. In the practice you will be required to drink about six glasses of water. Therefore, about two litres of warm water should be sufficient, though you can use your discretion as to the amount of water required. The salt should be added in the proportion two teaspoonsful per litre of water. Make sure the salt is clean, and fully dissolved in the water.

It is important that you use salt water, so that the water is not absorbed through the intestinal walls into the body. The aim is to ensure that the water passes from the stomach throughout the length of the intestines without any absorption whatsoever. If you use water without salt, then all the water will be quickly absorbed in the early part of the intestines, without ever reaching the bowels. The salt water creates a high osmotic pressure, much higher than pure water, preventing absorption and allowing the salt water to flush through the system.

Asanas

You will be required to perform five special asanas during the practice. These are tadasana, tiryak tadasana, kati chakrasana, tiryak bhujangasana and udarakarshanasana³.

Place of practice

This depends on circumstances and climatic conditions. If you live in a warm country, you can practise in your backyard or on the lawn. Otherwise, practise in your bathroom or in the room where you normally practise your asanas.

Time and sequence

You should practise when your stomach is empty. As such, the best time is early in the morning.

LAGHOO SHANKHAPRAKSHALANA

Prepare the warm salt water.
Quickly drink 2 glasses of water.
Then practise the following asanas³:
tadasana – 8 times

tiryak tadasana – 8 times
kati chakrasana – 8 times
tiryak bhujangasana – 8 times
udarakarshanasana – 8 times.

The sequence should be as we have given.
Then drink 2 more glasses of the warm salty water.

Repeat the 5 asanas, 8 times each.
Finally drink 2 more glasses and again repeat the asanas.

Having drunk 6 glasses, now go to the toilet. Don't strain whether you have a bowel movement or not. If you don't have a movement, it will come later.

Frequency

If you suffer from constipation, then you can practise every day. Otherwise, practise once or twice a week or whenever you have the time to spare.

Limitations

People who suffer from ulcers, whether peptic or duodenal, should only practise laghoo shankhaprakshalana under expert guidance. People with high blood pressure should take care if they practise alone; again it is best to practise under expert supervision.

Precautions

After completing the practice wait for half an hour before eating.

We emphasize again, that you should not, under any circumstances, try to force a bowel movement. This is the easiest way to develop piles. The bowel movement should be natural.

Benefits

People with digestive problems such as constipation, flatulence, acidity, indigestion and other digestive maladies are advised to practise this technique. Laghoo shankhaprakshalana is an excellent method of purifying the body, and of preventing or helping to remove a diverse number of ailments. We suggest that you seek expert guidance to find out whether it will help to remove any ailment that you have.

Our body is composed of about seventy percent water; our kidneys filter between fifteen and twenty gallons of water every day. Most of this purified water is circulated into the bloodstream, while the waste materials of our body are eliminated in the urine. The structure and health of our body is wholly dependent on a plentiful supply of water – not merely water, but clean, fresh water. Therefore, if you want to take positive steps to keep your body in the cleanest, healthiest condition, or remove existing impurities, there is no better way than to drink plenty of water every day. Try to make this a habit.

Notes

- ¹ Disorders of digestion: Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 1
- ² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2
- ³ Topic 3 of this lesson

Asanas: Shankhaprakshalana Asanas

The following five asanas are to be specifically used in the intestinal cleansing practices of shankhaprakshalana¹ and laghoo shankhaprakshalana²:

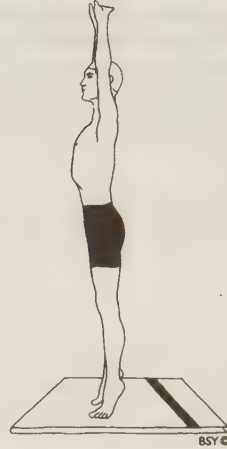
1. Tadasana
2. Tiryak tadasana
3. Kati chakrasana
4. Tiryak bhujaingasana
5. Udarakarshanasana

This series of asanas has a special role to perform in these practices, for they systematically open the various intestinal valves between the stomach and the bowels. That is, these asanas, when performed in the given sequence, progressively open the pyloric valve (at the outlet of the stomach), then the ileocecal valve (at the exit of the small intestine) and finally the valve (or sphincter) which forms the anus³. Therefore the prescribed sequence of asanas is important, and they should be done in the order listed. In this way, the salt water is encouraged to flow from the beginning of the intestines to the rectum. It is for this reason that these asanas are especially incorporated into the two cleansing practices. Other asanas can also be used, but our experience in the ashram, and that of yogis throughout the ages, has shown that these five particular asanas are the most suitable.

These asanas also give benefits in their own right, apart from association with these cleansing processes. These will be described in the following text.

TADASANA (PALM TREE POSE)

The Sanskrit word *tada* means 'palm tree' and therefore, not surprisingly, the English translation of this pose is the 'palm tree pose'. It is also often known as the heavenly stretch pose, because this is exactly what you do in this asana: stretch the body upwards towards the heavens.



Technique

Stand erect with your feet about 15 cms apart. Keep your eyes open throughout the practice. Gaze at a point directly in front of, or above you; this can be on the wall, ceiling, or if you are practising outside, in the distance.

The object of your attention is not important, but you must keep your gaze fixed on it throughout the entire practice.

Interlock the fingers of both hands.

Then hold your arms directly above your head. Gently adjust your hands so that the palms face upwards.

Then stretch your whole body upwards as far as possible.

Straighten your arms, but keep the hands interlocked.

Raise yourself on tiptoes, all the time trying to stretch up as high as you can.

At first, it may be difficult to maintain balance, but with practice it becomes easier; the important thing is that you keep your gaze fixed on the chosen point.

Remain in the final position for a few seconds. Then lower the body and bend and relax the arms. Allow the backs of your hands to rest on top of your head.

This is 1 round. Rest for a second or two. Then repeat another round, stretching your whole body, arms and legs, as much as you can.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe in deeply as you raise the body. Hold your breath in the final raised position, and breathe out as you lower your body. The breathing should also be coordinated with the raising and lowering of the hands.

Direct your attention to any fixed point. Some people prefer to look at a point in front of the body, either at a distance or a near point, while others prefer to watch their raised hands. Choose for yourself. However, we have found that it is easier to maintain balance if you look at a fixed point in front of you.

Number of rounds

For shankhaprakshalana and laghoo shankhaprakshalana do eight rounds. Otherwise, for general health purposes, you can practise as many rounds as you wish. Tadasana should be done after sirshasana (the headstand pose) as a counterpose. In this case, one should stay in the final position for as long as possible, breathing slowly and deeply.

Benefits

This asana develops a sense of balance. The whole body is stretched, which loosens up the entire spinal column from top to bottom. Furthermore, the abdominal organs and muscles are toned up.

TIRYAK TADASANA (SWAYING PALM TREE POSE)

Technique

Stand erect with the feet about 15 cms apart. Stretch your arms above your head, fingers interlocked, in the same way as described for tadasana.

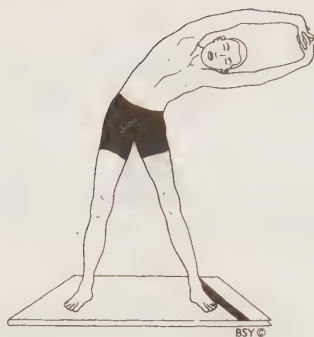
Throughout the practice keep your gaze fixed on a point in front of your body.

Stretch your whole body and raise yourself on tiptoes.

Maintain this stretched position, and bend your body to the right.

Then bend your body to the left, keeping your arms in line with the trunk.

This is 1 round.



Try to bend your body from the waist.

Do a number of rounds, all the time keeping the body stretched and balanced on the balls of your feet.

Then relax your body and stand with your feet flat on the ground.

Some people may find it difficult to balance on tiptoes for the entire practice.

These people can do the asana while standing firmly with their feet flat on the floor. When they develop a better sense of balance, they can start to do the practice on tiptoes.

These people however, should try to balance on their tiptoes for at least a few seconds each time they do the asana, as this will help them to develop the sense of balance.

Breathing

The breathing pattern should be normal.

Mistakes to avoid

In this asana keep your body and head facing forwards.

Awareness, number of rounds and benefits

These are as given for tadasana.

KATI CHAKRASANA (WAIST ROTATING POSE)

The Sanskrit word *kati* means 'waist' and *chakra* means 'circle', 'wheel' or 'rotation'. Therefore, in English this asana is the 'waist rotating pose'.

Technique

Stand erect with the feet about half a metre apart.

Let your arms hang limply beside your body. Then twist your body to the right, keeping the position of your feet and legs fixed.



As you twist, allow your arms to rotate and to entwine your body (like a creeper around a tree); that is, allow your right arm to swing behind your back and your left arm to swing over your right shoulder.

Your arms and back should be relaxed as much as possible throughout the practice.

At the end of the twisting motion, also rotate your head as far as possible in the same direction as the twist of the back.

In the final position, your left hand should rest on your right shoulder; your right hand should be in contact with the left side of your waist; and your eyes should gaze backwards over your right shoulder.

Stay in this position for half a second or so.

Then twist your body in the opposite direction so that eventually you are gazing over your left shoulder, and your arms are wrapped around the body in the opposite sense to that already described.

Again, stay in the final position for half a second.

This is 1 round.

In the same way practise a number of rounds. Remember your arms should not be stiff while doing the asana – think of them as two lengths of rubber hanging from your shoulders; in this way, they will passively encircle your body as you rotate your shoulders from the waist. Perform the whole movement smoothly, without jerking or stiffness.

Breathing and awareness

The breathing pattern should be normal.

Keep your awareness on totally relaxing your arms, and on the sense of swing as you rotate your body.

Number of rounds

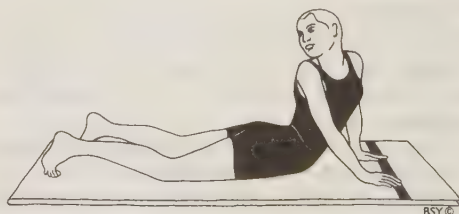
Practise eight times for shankhaprakshalana and laghoo shankhaprakshalana; otherwise, as many times as you wish.

Benefits

This asana tones up the waist, back and hip joints. It is particularly useful for removing spinal stiffness. Though it is a simple asana, the mere relaxation and swinging movement of the upper part of the body induces a wonderful feeling of lightness. In fact, we feel this asana can be used to remove physical and mental tension when you have little time to spare. Also, if you have been sitting or standing in one position for a long period of time, you will more than likely feel very stiff. This is an excellent asana for quickly and effectively removing this stiffness.

TIRYAK BHUJANGASANA (TWISTING COBRA POSE)

The word *tiryak* means 'triangular' or 'diagonal', and *bhujanga* means 'cobra'. The word *tiryak* is used here for two good reasons. Firstly, because in the final pose one gazes over the shoulder diagonally across the back of the body at the heel on the opposite side. Secondly, because one gazes over each shoulder in turn at the heels, the direction of the gaze from each shoulder forms two sides of a triangle, while the width between the shoulders forms the base or third side of the triangle. However, this is a bit complicated for translation, especially if you try to associate it with a cobra. One English name of this asana is the 'twisting cobra pose'.



Technique

Lie on the floor facing downwards.

The balls of your feet should be in contact with the ground; the feet can be together or slightly separated.

Place your hands so that they are below and beside both shoulder blades, (that is, so that the hands are about half a metre apart). Straighten your arms, and raise your shoulders and head off the ground.

Let your back remain limp and passive.

As you raise your body, simultaneously twist your back slightly to the right.

Turn your head and gaze over the right shoulder to your left heel.

Your back should remain totally relaxed.

In the final position, your arms should be straight.

Don't strain, but try to twist your head and back as much as you can in the final position, keeping your navel as close as possible to the ground.

Stay in the final position for a second or so.

Then face forwards again.

Bend your arms and lower your body.

Repeat exactly the same procedure, but twisting the body and head to the left side, and looking at your right heel over your left shoulder.

Having completed this, return to the starting position.

This is one round.

Practise more rounds according to your capacity and available time.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe normally in the starting position. Breathe in as you raise your body. While in the final raised position hold your breath and as you lower the body to the ground breathe out.

While raising and lowering the body, be aware of breathing and relaxation of the back, together with movement of the body. Try to synchronize the breathing with the body movement. In the final position direct your attention to the opposite heel.

Mistakes to avoid

Many people stiffen their backs and raise the abdomen off the ground when they move into the final position. This is wrong. Allow your back to relax, so that it sags towards the ground in the final pose. This relaxation enables greater movement of the trunk.

Number of rounds

Refer to kati chakrasana.

Limitations

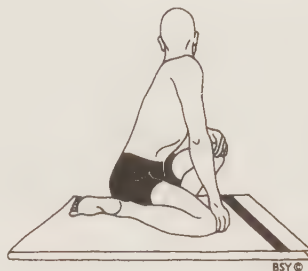
Those people who suffer from peptic or duodenal ulcers, or hernia, should not do this asana.

Benefits

For full details of the benefits obtainable from this asana refer to the description of bhujangasana⁴.

UDARAKARSHANASANA (ABDOMINAL STRETCH POSE)

The word *udara* means the 'stomach' and 'abdomen', and *akarshan* means 'to stretch' or 'massage'. Therefore this is known as the 'abdominal massage pose'.



Technique

Take a squatting position, with your feet about half a metre apart.

Place your hands on your knees.

Turn to the right side, pushing your left knee to the ground.

Don't move the position of the feet, though you can allow the heels to rise.

Keep your hands on your knees throughout the practice.

Twist your head and back as far as possible, and gaze over your right shoulder.

Allow your back to relax.

Stay in the final position for half a second or so.

Return to the squatting position.

Repeat the same procedure, twisting your body in the other direction, pushing your right knee to the floor and looking over your left shoulder.

Then return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Note for beginners

Beginners and those people who have a stiff back, may find difficulty maintaining balance. Under these circumstances lean against a wall when you take the squatting position. Your heels should be about twenty centimetres or so from the wall. This will give you support, but at the same time allow you to twist your body in the way described for the asana.

Breathing and awareness

The breathing should be normal. Maintain awareness of the movement.

Number of rounds

Refer to kati chakrasana.

Benefits

This is a very useful asana for people with abdominal ailments, because it alternately compresses and stretches the digestive organs, nerves and muscles.

If you suffer from constipation, we recommend that you practise this regularly, as it helps to encourage the normal functioning of the large intestine and the anal sphincter.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

² Topic 2 of this lesson

³ For clarification refer to the diagram of the digestive system – Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 1

⁴ Book I; Lesson 4; Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

Here we will briefly discuss the technique of *kevala kumbhaka*. The Sanskrit word *kevala* means 'only', and *kumbhaka* means 'breath retention' or 'cessation'. The word *kevala* is directly connected with the word *kaivalya* meaning 'onlyness', but is another name for *samadhi*, *nirvana* or supreme enlightenment and union. Therefore *kevala* and *kaivalya* mean that experience which is beyond duality, beyond mere conceptions, beyond words. Any description of the experience immediately distorts it and can never adequately convey its essence. For this reason, the words *kevala* and *kaivalya* are used as a suitable nondescription of the indescribable.

Kevala kumbhaka is the spontaneous cessation of breath that occurs with the state of *samadhi*, attained through *pranayama* and the meditation methods of *raja yoga*. If *kevala kumbhaka* arises, then *samadhi* must also simultaneously occur. One goes with the other.

Other forms of *kumbhaka* (such as *antar kumbhaka* in *nadi shodhana* stage 3) are known collectively as *sahita kumbhaka*¹. The word *sahita* means 'combined with something'. In other words, these other types of *kumbhaka* are combined with and brought about by other practices; they require effort to perform them and do not arise spontaneously; they are not directly related to *samadhi*. These *kumbhakas* are performed in order to induce the spontaneous occurrence of *kevala kumbhaka*, where one becomes perfectly receptive to the inflow of higher consciousness.

The *bandhas* (*jalandhara*, *uddiyana* and *moola*) are powerful techniques of inducing *kevala kumbhaka*, especially if they are combined with *pranayama* practices².

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 3 (NEW RATIO)

Having mastered the ratio given in the previous lesson (namely 1:6:4:1:6:4) you should now proceed to the next ratio which is 1:8:6:1:8:6 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation³.

Remember, if you have not yet mastered an earlier stage then persevere until you gain proficiency. Don't proceed to a more advanced stage prematurely. If possible try to increase the time that you practise *pranayama* daily, beyond what is prescribed in the suggested practice program. The more you practise, the more proficient you will become and the greater will be the results.

However, don't strain. You should slowly gain mastery over the breathing process.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

² *Jalandhara bandha*: Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3;
uddiyana bandha: Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3;
moola bandha: Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 5

Trataka and Concentration

Concentration is the essence of trataka. And it is through powerful concentration that one makes progress in yoga¹.

The power of concentration

What is concentration? It is one-pointedness of mind, the ability to hold, to focus one's attention on one point, without wavering. Perfect concentration leads to meditation. In meditation practices, such as trataka, concentration leads to complete mental attention on one object, form or thought to the exclusion of all others. There is no distraction from the environment or other peripheral things.

Why is deep concentration so powerful? This can be best illustrated by comparing the mind of an average person to a light bulb. The rays of light go in all directions; the energy emanating from the centre filament is dissipated, spread in all directions. If you stand five feet away from the bulb you will see the light, but will not feel any direct heat, even though there is intense heat at the centre of the bulb in the filament. In the same way the mind of the average person has vast dormant potential and power at its source, its centre, but this is dissipated in all directions. The mind thinks of a continuous stream of things, one after the other, without dwelling on one subject or aim in any depth. The power is present in each person, but it is not focussed and used.

In recent years science has produced something that was once the main topic of science fiction novels – the laser. It is an apparatus that lines up all the rays of light from a source so that they are in unison with each other, so that they vibrate together in perfect harmony. The original source of light need not be great, not even as great as the average light bulb filament that we have just mentioned, yet if you stood five feet away from a laser source, the beam would almost instantaneously burn a hole straight through your body. This is the power of concentrated light. Concentrated

thought, though unlikely to bore a hole in the body, also has vast power. A concentrated mind acts as an irresistible instrument of action; it leads to efficiency in all one's activities in the outside world; it is a dynamo which generates vitality and enthusiasm in every direction. A concentrated mind also has the ability to be a sensitive receiving instrument; it becomes receptive to higher vibrations, to heightened perception. It becomes a receiver of the influx of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge. All this is normally beyond the range of the average mind for it is too disturbed and distracted by a continual inner chatter of thoughts. Concentration is the key that will unlock the door to higher states of awareness.

Physiology of trataka

Most people have heard of the pineal gland. It is a small pea-sized gland above the top of the spine, in the centre of the head between the two ears (technically it is located between the two cerebral hemispheres and above the cerebellum). This small body has yet to be understood by modern science, and does not seem to have any specific physiological function. Yoga, on the other hand, together with various spiritual systems throughout the ages, both eastern and western, says that this gland is the link, the antenna for higher vibrations. When it is stimulated or awakened then one can start to tune in with more subtle patterns of existence.

It is significant that the eyes are connected directly with the pineal gland, via the sympathetic nervous system. This much modern physiology has determined, together with various other factors which have recently come to light. The centre of the sympathetic nervous system, as well as the parasympathetic, is the hypothalamus. The hypothalamus is also the centre of wakefulness and pleasure together with sleep and pain. Therefore the eyes, the pineal gland, the sympathetic nervous system,

the hypothalamus and the wakefulness of an individual are all intimately connected with each other, directly or indirectly. Mental concentration of any type will tend to bring these systems into a high level of sensitivity. This, as we have already pointed out, allows the infiltration and flow of higher consciousness through the pineal gland.

In *trataka* the whole system is stimulated and awakened by concentration through the eyes. This induces higher sensitivity of the pineal gland and directly – via the sympathetic nervous system – greater wakefulness in the individual. This is why *trataka* is such a powerful technique; it directly influences the pineal gland. Furthermore, all other disturbing thoughts, which reduce receptivity, are blocked out, at least temporarily, because of the intense concentration. All these factors help to lead the individual to higher experiences.

Other techniques perform the same function; they induce concentration and sensitivity in the human system, and in particular the pineal gland, though sometimes in a more direct manner. *Pranayama*, for example, directly influences the hypothalamus, which is the centre of respiration; in this way wakefulness is induced and receptivity amplified. This is possibly the mode of operation of certain types of drugs. They somehow render the system, including the pineal gland, more sensitive to higher vibrations.

Choice of object

We have already discussed how you should choose your object for *trataka*². The following quotations by Swami Satyananda, in the book *Steps to Yoga*, clearly emphasize what has already been explained: “We can give any pattern to the mind. We can shape it in the pattern of a woman, a man, or a pot, or a watch or a body. When we concentrate on Krishna, our mind assumes the form of Krishna which gradually becomes consumed in self-consciousness, resulting in *nirvikalpa samadhi*.”

“When the mind merges in the form of the *Ishta Devata* (personal deity), the sense consciousness is withdrawn.

“You should select that object which would at once magnetize your mind and compel it to withdraw itself from all other objects.

“When the mind is merged in the one form, the light in us manifests itself.

“Concentration is the key to open the gates of that great power. When you successfully concentrate on one idea or form, you enter *dhyana* (meditation). Whether you are a devotee of God or an atheist, you can realize the glory through meditation. A person having faith in God can meditate on any choicest form of God, through which he will attain realization. An atheist can choose a flower, or a star, or the nose tip, between the eyebrows, or the heart and so on. The result will be the same.”

Therefore, choose your object carefully and then practise earnestly.

Note also that though we have described the technique of *trataka*, where one creates the image in front of the eyes, there is absolutely no reason why you should not mentally create a picture at the heart centre. Many of the ancient yogic texts recommend this place for creation of the image. In the *Katha Upanishad* it says that one can create an image at the heart, such as an inner-image the size of the thumb. You must therefore experiment for yourself and find the best object and the best location. Don't feel limited to the objects and techniques that we have given, for this is only intended as a guide.

Awareness and concentration

Though the immediate and primary aim of *trataka* is to develop concentration, you should not force yourself to concentrate. Concentration must arise spontaneously. Try to maintain awareness of the object of *trataka*. That is, allow extraneous thoughts to arise, but while simultaneously being attentive to the object. You must split your attention between distracting thoughts and the object. Don't become lost in the stream of invading thoughts, but merely watch them with a feeling of disinterest. If you do this, then the unwanted thoughts will automatically subside, and concentration will arise. Of course, on occasions your mind may be more agitated than usual; you should still follow the same procedure, though it may be difficult to attain any degree of concentration. This awareness is important, for if you try to force the mind to concentrate you will only create more tension and less concentration. So be aware. Don't battle with the wandering mind, for you will lose. Tame the mind and mould it into a state of concentration by adopting the attitude of awareness.

Conclusion

Trataka is a very powerful, yet deceptively simple practice. When you are able to concentrate on an object then that object becomes the focus, the form of your consciousness. In other words, if your object is a candle, then this does not merely represent your consciousness, it is your consciousness. We don't expect you to understand this, we are merely pointing it out to you. All you have to do is to practise trataka and merge your being into the object, form or thought and disappear into it like an arrowhead into a target. Practise for yourself and discover your own experience.

Notes

¹ Trataka: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6
Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6
Stage 3 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

Meditation: Practice

There is no limit to the number of possible meditation practices. Any theme can be used as the focal point of your attention. The most essential stipulation is that you must choose something that will easily hold your attention. If this is not the case then you will gain little or nothing from the practice.

So far in the book we have given methods which are based on traditional techniques given in the yogic and tantric texts. In this topic we will introduce you to another possible theme for meditative purposes.

The following are poems written by famous mystical poets. You may already be familiar with them. Poems, especially ones of a spiritual nature, can be used as an object of meditation. They are trying to express something that the poet has realized. He is trying to convey the inexpressible through the inadequate medium of words.

If you read a poem a thousand times and try to analyze it logically or from the viewpoint of everyday experience, then you will gain nothing – only a headache. First try to understand the surface meaning of the words and then reflect on their deeper significance. If you only come up with an intellectual understanding that you can easily discuss with another person, then discard it. Reject it, for the poem means far more. Let the content of the poem gravitate to deeper levels of your being. Develop an intense need to know what the poet is really trying to express. If you find the answer you will definitely know; it will hit you like a thunderbolt. It will shatter all your previous conclusions, convictions and understanding.

You can think about the real meaning of the poem at any time of the day. In fact if you really have a strong need to find the meaning, then the reflection, the enquiry will continue all the time below the level of everyday consciousness. It will continue without your awareness. However, the best time to consciously reflect on the meaning is when you are

relaxed and receptive. We suggest you practise immediately after your yoga practice program or perhaps before sleep.

Choose any of the following poems (or any other). Reflect on its deeper significance but try not to be blocked by mere intellectual understanding. If you think you understand its meaning, and feel that the meaning is obvious, then you have not really understood.

REFLECTION ON A POEM

Poem 1

*To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.*

—William Blake

Poem 2

*When I open my eyes to the outer world,
I feel myself as a drop in the sea;
But when I close my eyes and look within,
I see the whole universe as a bubble
Raised in the ocean of my heart.*

—Inayat Khan

Poem 3

*That is full, this is full.
From full, the full is taken,
the full has come.
If you take out the fullness from the full,
the fullness still remains.*

—Ishavasya Upanishad

Poem 4

*Man has a real existence,
But it has nothing to do with place;
He has continuance,
But it has nothing to do with beginning and end.*

—Taoism

Choose any poem that appeals to you, which fascinates you. Reflect on it. What does it really mean? And remember if you think you know the meaning, it is almost a certainty that you don't. Only if you start to jump with joy and bliss, could it be that you have unfathomed the knowledge contained within.

Daily Practice Program

If you suffer from constipation then you should definitely try to practise laghoo shankhaprakshalana, either occasionally or on a daily basis. It is such a simple practice and it can help to make your 'burden' lighter throughout the rest of the day.

Try to bear in mind and practise what we have said about deconditioning and dis-identification, as well as the previous methods

of alleviating mental problems¹. Remember effort and need are required on your part; no one else can remove your problems for you. You must work them out, and remove them yourself.

Continue your practice of trataka and if you have spare time, reflect on one of the poems we have given for a few minutes.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Shashank Bhujangasana	—	3
Ushtrasana	2 times	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	5
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	14
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
Reflection on poem	—	5
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama:	—	
Stage 2	—	4
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	10
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	30
Reflection on poem	—	5
		60

Program 3: duration ¾ hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	1 each way	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	—	
Stage 2	—	3
Stage 3 (new ratio)	—	7
Trataka: Stages 1, 2 or 3	—	15
		45

Find time to reflect on the meaning of one of the poems given.

Program 4: duration ½ hour (for general health) is as for the above Program 3, excluding the practice of Trataka.

Notes

- ¹ Removal of mental problems: Book I, Lesson 9,
Topic 2; Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2

Lesson 12

To abide by the laws of karma yoga is an uphill task but surely not an impossible one. The karma yogi goes on his way through small day to day events. The test lies in trying the attitude of man towards daily problems, severe and ordinary. The one who can detach himself from the exciting effects of joyful events, and from the maddening effects of sorrowful events is a karma yogi in the true sense of the word, for he has offered all he has. For such a man, prayer does not mean remembrance for a few routine minutes, but it means offering of the whole, full life. For such a person, then life itself becomes a constant prayer. Make your life a constant prayer by dedicating yourself to karma yoga.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Karma Yoga (Part 1)

Karma yoga is the yoga of action or work. Its aim is to bring about integration, harmony and union through action. It is a yogic path that is open to everyone, for we all have to work and perform various activities, whether physical or mental. In fact, it is most suitable for the modern, activity oriented world and is ideal for those of us who find it easier to do something than nothing, which is everyone, for there is nobody who can do absolutely nothing. It is impossible. There must always be some form of action, even if it is sleeping, day dreaming or trying to do nothing. It is through karma yoga that we can start to practise yoga twenty-four hours a day using our actions as a means to gain higher awareness.

The significance of karma yoga is usually overlooked by newcomers to yoga and even by people who have been practising other forms of yoga, such as raja yoga and hatha yoga, for many years. The regular practice of yoga techniques for a fixed time every day brings many benefits. Yet one should try to practise yoga throughout the whole day. This is possible through karma yoga. Asanas, pranayama, meditation techniques, etc. bring wonderful results, experiences and knowledge, but one must relate these inner experiences, obtained during these practices, to everyday life. It is for this reason that we have introduced karma yoga at a reasonably early stage in the book – to enable you to put it into practice to the best of your ability. In this way, you will gain much more from the more tangible yoga techniques that you practise every day, including kriya yoga in the future.

Karma yoga as a means to meditation

Karma yoga can lead to exactly the same experiences as other forms of yoga. There is no doubt about this. But it is difficult for most people to appreciate this point, for other paths of yoga such as raja yoga, seem more 'yogic'.

There is a tendency to think that work cannot possibly be yoga, and of course mere work is not yoga. Karma yoga implies something far greater and more profound than work. It implies selfless, concentrated actions, with awareness.

Karma yoga is an important technique for growth and progress along the spiritual path. It helps to bring peace and equanimity into one's life. In itself, it leads directly to higher awareness and knowledge, even though these experiences bear little relation to the actual work being carried out. It is the inner experience that is important, and this is something that cannot be conveyed by words.

Swami Satyananda, like his guru Swami Sivananda, affirms and emphasizes the importance of karma yoga in order to know the experience of meditation. He proclaims: "One should do one task at a time. Total absorption in any work will gradually train the mind to forget its usual fickleness and unsteadiness. If you plunge into the work at hand with undivided keenness and attention, you will derive great help in meditation."

Everyone in the ashram practises karma yoga in one form or another, in the press, office, library; kitchen or wherever karma yoga is an integral and indispensable part of ashram life.

The motto of karma yoga is to: give – give – and give. The prevailing motto in the world is the opposite, namely to: take – take – and take more. It is this latter attitude that prevents progress in spiritual life and the experience of meditation. All the great spiritual teachers throughout history preached that one should reduce and eventually eliminate all actions and thoughts that are motivated by personal gain. Of course this takes time and cannot be done overnight, yet it is absolutely necessary, if one is to eliminate the power of the ego, the obstacle or the veil which prevents the influx of higher consciousness.

Concentration, willpower and mental problems

Most people have a mind that can be compared to a river with a large number of eddy currents. These currents continually react, clash and oppose the mainstream flow. The result is incessant disturbance, turmoil, friction and loss of energy. If engineers want to tap the power of the river for electrical distribution, they have to channel the water flow into one powerful and unified current with as few eddy currents as possible. Then they have to build and install a turbogenerator, which actually converts the energy of the flowing river into electrical energy. There is a transformation of energy. It is the same with the mind. Normally it is disturbed with endless thought currents which continually interact with each other. The fluctuating mind lacks unified power. Yet this situation can be changed and the mind can be made powerful by firstly channelling the thought currents so that they flow in one harmonious stream, without conflict. The mind has to be concentrated until it becomes a perfect instrument, with an integrated single thought flow. This is the role of karma yoga. A concentrated and powerful mind brings this about; it transforms one's experience of life. It leads to things one does not expect just as it is difficult to understand how electrical energy that lights up your house and drives the household gadgets can possibly come from the energy of flowing water. This is the aim of karma yoga: to channel our thoughts and actions so that the mind helps us instead of hindering us, so that the mind becomes one-pointed and a perfect receiver and reflector of experience and higher awareness. Karma yoga, as well as other forms of yoga, develops willpower. The importance of individual willpower is often overlooked. Few people in fact really know what it is. It can be defined as the ability to motivate, mobilize and harmonize all one's activities for the attainment of a definite purpose. In karma yoga, the practitioner sets out to do his work and duties with as much attention and involvement as possible. Using one's inherent skills and abilities, one attempts to achieve maximum efficiency. In fact, the *Bhagavad Gita* has defined karma yoga as 'efficiency in action'. This total absorption in the work at hand leads to great willpower and unleashing of the powers within the mind. The

whole mind and body becomes integrated and tuned to a high degree of sensitivity, and from this one can start to experience meditation.

It is during work and other activities that you can recognize your mental problems. It is through karma yoga that they are recognized and exhausted. It is for this reason that Swami Satyananda says: "Work would become a source of happiness if one can recognize it as a stepping stone towards spiritual enlightenment – samadhi. Karma yoga is the outlet for one's mixed samskaras (mental impressions and problems)."

Karma yoga is a means to clean out the mind of phobias, problems, fears and all other disturbing factors. During karma yoga, a person has to face all types of experiences, whether good or bad. From these experiences you can learn about yourself, your fallibilities and hang-ups. And none of us can avoid work, so why try. We are forced by our very nature to perform actions, so we might as well accept the situation and work. Yet at the same time we should use this work as a method of cleansing the mind and treading the path to higher awareness. Don't merely work, but work with awareness and gain more from your work. This is the aim of karma yoga.

Karma yoga is a method of harnessing the potential of the mind. Each of us has access to this incredible power and knowledge, yet most people never contact it. Karma yoga is the method of unleashing it and using it. Nothing is developed; the potential is already there waiting to be discovered and used.

The playground of the world

The world of karma, actions, thoughts, situations and circumstances is a testing ground. It is a place where one can find out about oneself. It is a workshop, where the mind-body instrument can be sharpened and made receptive to the influx of higher knowledge and awareness. It is in the world that we can test if the psychophysical blade needs sharpening. If it is blunt, which is usually the case, it is through the world of everyday experiences that it can be sharpened to cut through the veil of ignorance. The world is to be used as a means to tuning the mind-body complex.

Many people go to quiet places to find peace. They don't realize that they are carrying the source of their unhappiness within them. Some

people spend years and years in isolation, yet they often fail to find the peace that they so desperately seek. The reason is simple – it is very difficult to find your mental problems when there is no interaction with other people. The problems remain in the mind and act as blocks, though unrecognized blocks. Most people have to interact with others, if they are to confront and remove their mental problems. There is one man who spent five years as a hermit in the Himalayas, intent on finding the experience of illumination. He never found what he was looking for and was eventually forced to return to society. He admitted that although he gained something, he could probably have gained more by remaining in society and practising karma yoga and other yogic practices. Many people have made the same mistake.

If you want to progress on the yogic path it is not necessary to become a recluse and retire to a mountain cave. If you do so, you may feel a taste of peace and tranquillity, but it probably will not be of sufficient depth to allow the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. It will more than likely be a very superficial sense of happiness. Your mental blocks will remain within your mind and prevent meditation.

You will probably be forced to leave your solitude to remove your problems. Not only this, but your desires and cravings for objects, tasty food, etc., which you previously did not think twice about, will drive you back to society. Objects, tasty food, etc., which you took for granted, will envelop the mind, and your thoughts will be totally absorbed in memories of previous enjoyments. We are not saying that people waste their time when they sojourn in the Himalayas, or in any other quiet place, for many have transformed their whole life in this way. But the people who gain meaningful experiences under these circumstances are people who have previously exhausted most of their problems in society. A person who has a reasonably calm mind will probably make good progress and have wonderful experiences in solitude. But the majority of people will waste their time. It is first of all necessary to clean the mind within society while doing yoga, including karma yoga.

It is in the middle of a teeming city or town, or while involved in disruptive work situations that you are faced with the most overwhelming

problems. Otherwise it is difficult to confront them, let alone remove them. A person who lives in a protected environment is not likely to know his or her problems for they will never know the unhappiness of facing uncomfortable situations. It is necessary to become involved with life and practise karma yoga.

Our ashram is situated in a most unlikely place; it seems on initial consideration, to be very badly located. It lies between a railway line and a dusty road. It appears to be caught between 'the devil and the deep blue sea'. Throughout the day the road is very busy, for it is the main road to the River Ganges. It is on this road that the dead are taken to the river for cremation. This is done in a noisy procession, accompanied by a fanfare of drums and trumpets and other clanging instruments. There is continuous noise around the ashram and visitors often comment that the location is most unsuitable. They have concepts and visions of an ashram in the middle of a forest, with thousands of peacocks and other brightly coloured singing birds, running streams of crystal clear water, herds of deer, and perhaps Lord Shiva himself meditating under a tree. Their preconceived ideas are destroyed when they first see our ashram, but it is more than a certainty that the location is perfectly satisfactory because the ashram is not intended as a retreat. It is not a place to escape from the world. If one wants to escape the big, bad world then the ashram is the wrong and the last place to come. It is too noisy, for it retains its relationship with the activities of the outside world. The ashram is actually situated in an ideal place, for if one can do their yogic practices in the ashram then one can do them almost anywhere. It is a place where one learns to come to terms with oneself and the world, where one clearly recognizes and eventually eliminates inner problems. It is a place to practise karma yoga. It is not a place where you can languish in a sleepy state of calmness, and perhaps be fooled into thinking that you are meditating. It is similar to the busy world in general – a place where one interacts with others and discovers one's mental blocks.

To summarize: the world is not to be shunned. It is a place to be used in order to remove our faults and imperfections. There are many people who regard spiritual life, including yoga,

as being divorced from day to day activities and life in general. This is completely wrong. A person must work, but at the same time transform it by doing karma yoga. This is the path to spiritual experience. Eventually a stage will come when you will feel an inner silence and peace amongst even the most intense activity, harassing situations and the noisiest surroundings. At this stage, one is ready to go to the mountains, though there will actually be no need. There will be a feeling of peace in all situations and one will live in the experience of meditation. This is clearly stated in the *Astravakra Gita*: "The enlightened one neither avoids the crowd, nor seeks the forest. Under all conditions, in any place, he remains perfectly balanced." (18:100) One will practise karma yoga, in the deepest sense, continuously.

Fundamentals of karma yoga

The path of karma yoga accepts the material world around us. It accepts that we must function in the world, but its aim is to use the objects, thoughts and actions that now bind each individual, in a constructive manner, to eventually transcend them, break the bondage and attain freedom and knowledge. It is done progressively by acting in everyday life, with full awareness, to the best of one's ability. The aim is to become perfectly free in the fullest sense of the word; to become liberated and in tune with consciousness. Yet one cannot become free except by knowing, confronting, using and eventually transcending the limitations of the world. This is the purpose and realm of karma yoga. A butterfly cannot become free and able to fly immediately. First of all it must pass through the trauma and bondage of being a caterpillar. Eventually, the caterpillar skin is discarded and the butterfly is able to fly away to the bliss of freedom. It is the same with each human being; each person must fully experience and understand the world before being able to transcend it and know spiritual bliss and freedom.

One of the basic precepts of karma yoga is very simple, yet very profound: don't be attached to your actions and their consequences. Work then becomes play, it ceases to be work. Work is generally done with a motive and expectation of results or reward, whereas play is done for its own sake. It is from attachment, not the work itself, that we become

unhappy and discontented. Work rarely harms anyone – it is the expectations, status, rewards and so on that cause the mental turmoil. Therefore an important rule of karma yoga is to do your work, but not to become identified with it. Regard the work and its consequences (the fruit) as something completely separate from yourself. Let us illustrate this with an example. Imagine that you have just spent six months writing a book. It is your brainchild and all your own hard work. You are very proud of it and it is a part of you. Then somebody comes along, picks up the book, reads a few pages and abruptly asks: "Which idiot of an author wrote this?" not knowing that it is you. As a result you are insulted and angry, because your pride has been wounded. There are mental reverberations and besides having a furious argument with the critic of your book, you end up unhappy and depressed for many days. The cause of the unhappiness is not really the critic, though of course he might have been a little more diplomatic; the cause lies with your attachment to the book, the fruit of your work and endeavour. If you had regarded the book as something completely different to yourself, then you would not have suffered any upset and anguish as a result of the severe criticism. If you had considered that the book is not you, that it is only an object outside your body and mind, and only the result of actions performed by you, then the emotional and mental upheaval would not have occurred. It is only a matter of identification; yet wrong identification leads to unhappiness, whereas realistic identification leads to harmony in life situations.

Attachment brings pain and misery, while detachment brings about calmness and contentment. Try and change your existing attitudes and develop this detachment in every aspect of your life. It is only a method. From it will come relaxation and eventually higher awareness. Then the detachment will transform itself into love for everything, not ego love for one's own advantage, but compassion. This will happen as surely as night follows day, for you will understand the deeper relationship existing between all people and things.

Karma yoga aims at reducing the control and influence of the ego, and at eventually eliminating it. This effacement of ego becomes much easier if one feels devotion to a cause, to

a person or to a symbol of higher existence. Under these circumstances all one's actions are offered to the object of devotion whether it is a guru, deity or worthwhile cause. If these offerings or services are performed whole-heartedly, without thought of personal gain or advantage, then the individual will automatically perform actions selflessly. The ego motivated actions are reduced, for one's motives will be directed towards something outside oneself. One will automatically practise karma yoga.

This surrender of actions to something outside the ego is called bhakti yoga¹. It is very powerful and is suitable for those people who are more emotional in their makeup. It is very closely related to karma yoga under these circumstances.

Not everyone, however, feels any obvious, overwhelming devotion to someone or something. If this is the case you should try to be aware of your actions. Act like a witness, an observer of all activities as though they are occurring outside yourself. Watch all thoughts and physical actions and reactions with a disinterested attitude. This is closely related to detachment and also leads to dissolution of the ego.

Anyone who is practising or is trying to practise karma yoga does not necessarily need to believe in any religion or in any higher existence. On the other hand, it is not necessary to discard personal beliefs if you have them. Only try to work selflessly, whether sweeping the floor, writing a book, conducting a scientific experiment or doing the household duties.

Ego-centred and egoless action

We will deal with the subject of the ego at some length, for it is so important to understand, even intellectually, how much the ego stunts one's experience of existence and oneself. People seem to expect that loss of ego results in lethargy and laziness. But in fact, egolessness can lead to exactly the opposite: ceaseless and tireless energy and activity. One becomes super efficient in every action and work undertaken. Reduction of ego leads to spontaneous, intense and continuous action which is most appropriate for the given situation.

The very essence of karma yoga is unselfishness; egoless or selfless work, or at least as much as one is able. Actually, until one lives

in a state of meditation, there must always be an element of selfishness in one's actions. When the sense of ego is lost, even for a short period of time, then one is automatically in a state of higher awareness. Until this point, however, you must only do your best to practise karma yoga – nothing more. Try to do your work and make decisions to suit the situations as they arise and as they really are. Act in the way that is best for the given circumstances, instead of working and acting only to suit your personal motives and desires. This helps to reduce the power of the ego. All other forms of yoga help to reduce the hold, the grip of the ego, whether bhakti yoga, raja yoga, kriya yoga or whatever. They all aim at reducing the total and overwhelming identification with the individual mind and body, even if it is only for a short period of time. These short periods of intensified awareness and lessened ego states can carry over into everyday life. The purpose of karma yoga is to bring about a reduction of ego or even egoless states continuously throughout the whole day and night.

We have to be very careful with words otherwise confusion will arise. There must always be an ego in operation. It is an indispensable part of the mind-body complex. It is that part of each individual which co-ordinates the physical and mental functions of the human organism. Without the ego, the mind-body would become totally chaotic. Each organ and function within the organism would go its own way. The ego is absolutely necessary for synchronized functioning and harmony within the mind and body as a whole. The ego in itself is not bad; it is overidentification of the individual with the ego that causes all the problems.

When we say that one must reduce the ego, we mean the influence that the ego has on the external expression or internal attitude of an individual as a whole must be reduced. That is, one should allow the ego to perform its duties of maintaining order within the human organism, yet at the same time, the actions and expressions of the individual in the world should be as selfless as possible. One's actions should not be done for selfish reasons but because the entire situation, surroundings, of which the mind and body are a part, warrants it. The best way to illustrate this point more clearly is by giving an analogy. Consider the

heart of the human body. It is composed of many different cells each of which performs a definite and fixed function. In a sense, each cell of the heart has an independent existence in its own right. Let us say they have an ego. What would happen if each cell began to function independently and not for the overall good of the heart? What would happen if each cell refused to do its duty? The results would be disastrous. The heart would no longer be able to function as a whole and coordinated unit. The heart would reduce in efficiency or even break down completely. And in fact this is exactly what does happen in the case of cancer. The individual cells go their own way. The organ, in this analogy the heart, made up of multitudinous cells, ceases to act as an integrated whole. The cells obey, in a sense, their own egos, and no longer dedicate or sacrifice their duties to the best possible operation and advantage of the organ of which they are a part. Now let us enlarge the analogy a little. Instead of an individual cell, consider an individual human being. Each human has an ego so that the mental-physical organism maintains an identity, a reasonably fixed pattern and shape. This ego is similar to the coercive ego force within each cell, which holds and moulds the different atoms and molecules together, so that the cells keep an individual identity, while simultaneously being a part of the heart. Ideally each human should sacrifice for the good of the overall whole, in the same way that the cell sacrifices itself for the overall advantage and harmony of the whole organism. When man expresses himself in the outside world, the aim is to act in the way that is most conducive to harmony in the inner world and the world around, of which each of us is a contributing part. When a cell acts in a selfish manner, disorder occurs in the organ and disease results. When humans act egotistically, then they produce disorder in the world and within themselves. Each ego-centred act contributes to a disease called world cancer. This contribution may be small from an individual point of view, but the sum total of numerous individual selfish actions is disharmony on a world scale.

There is another factor. By not acting for the overall good of the heart or any other organ, the cancerous cell brings about its own downfall. Its ego-centred action results

in failure and eventual destruction of the organ and in turn disintegration of the cell's own material existence. It is the same with humans. All self-centred acts tend to bring about destruction of the individual, physically and mentally. By acting in accordance with the need, the dictates of the whole, the individual treads on the path to higher awareness. Moreover, every selfless and harmonious act also helps other people to tread the same path, even if they don't know it consciously. The more selfless you become the more you and others will gain in an overall and individual sense. This is a paradox, but nevertheless a great truth.

The previous analogy is perhaps a little crude, but it does clearly illustrate the desirability of egoless actions and the undesirability of ego-centred acts.

How does a person know the best actions to suit any given situation? This can only be achieved gradually through practising yoga and increasing your awareness. At first it is difficult, in fact impossible. But eventually it becomes easier and easier, and one spontaneously makes perfect, egoless actions. At first when you try to perform karma yoga, merely aim to practise to the best of your ability. The most appropriate action and decision for a situation requires an awareness of all the factors involved. It needs detachment, understanding and desirelessness. Most people have so many preferences, personal desires, and mental problems that they can only see a limited portion of any situation. The mental apparatus, because of lack of harmony, causes inadequate and unsuitable responses. Thus the actions of most people are rarely appropriate for the given circumstances. You may have seen such obvious cases for yourself, especially perhaps when you were a disinterested onlooker of other people. Because of lack of direct involvement, it is possible to take a more comprehensive and balanced view of the problem at hand. The people involved have been ruled by their own greed, passions, status, etc., intent on obtaining as much out of the situation as possible for themselves. The result was that the final actions and decisions were not the best that could have been made. As a spectator you could see very clearly how ego-centred the actions were. On the other hand egoless action is that which brings the

best possible results in a particular situation; it is perfectly suitable for the factors involved. But this is the spontaneous byproduct of meditation and for the present most people must just do their best to act without the ego.

It is worth pointing out, however, that even perfect actions with awareness, can still cause harm to other people or the surroundings. This is not the criterion of selfish action. Even great saints, who epitomize total egolessness, sometimes cause harm to others. But they have not done this for egotistical motives. This is the difference. They have either performed an act while in meditation that was the best that could be made and some people were hurt as a byproduct; or they have deliberately hurt another person, without the slightest ego motive, but for the good of the other person, perhaps to wake them up to higher experiences or to remove mental blocks. Actually, physical destruction is part of life; it is continually happening around us. The lion hunts the herd of zebra – no ego is involved. The zebra that is caught is merely the one that was not quick enough to escape. The lion must eat and a zebra has to provide the food. This is an example of a perfect, egoless action. The lion looks at the herd of zebra and chooses the zebra that is most vulnerable. The lion sees the situation as it is and then acts accordingly. The action is not clouded by dislike for one particular zebra, or by hatred of zebra as a whole. The act is made because the circumstances demand it. Take another example. Our body is continually throwing out dead cells. This is absolutely necessary for the health of the body. The best possible action is made to bring about maintenance and health of the body. A cell is not thrown out because there is enmity between it and the human ego, or because the cell is not as pretty as the neighbouring cell. The cell is discarded because it becomes superfluous. The cell is sacrificed because it is necessary in view of the overall consideration of the body. In a sense, it is perfect egoless activity. So it is with human actions; they become perfect if there is no personal, ego-centred motive involved. Some harm may be done, but the actions themselves will be warranted by the situation.

Thus, perfect egoless actions occur while in states of meditation, done spontaneously for the advantage of the whole, and not for

limited personal gain. However, this is the ideal and one must at present only do one's best. In fact, it is difficult to consciously reduce egotistical action, for most people are completely habituated and enveloped with the feeling of individuality.

The influence of the ego therefore must predominate. Practise all types of yoga, including karma yoga and try to be aware throughout the entire day. In time the power of the ego will automatically drop away. You will spontaneously begin to perform selfless acts, because of your experience and knowledge of the deeper aspects of existence and one's relationship with other people.

We have perhaps laboured the subject of the ego, but we have done so because it is essential to steadily reduce its power and influence in one's life. It is the ego that taints and diminishes your experience of life, that keeps a person blind to the things around and within and prevents the ascent into higher awareness. The whole point of karma yoga is to reduce and eventually eliminate the conditioned ego drives and actions.

Renunciation

It is very easy to totally misunderstand yogic ideas and to become bewildered by apparent contradictions. A good example is the idea of renunciation. One is often told to renounce the world and take up a life of contemplation. On the other hand, one hears that they should not discard objects and duties, but live fully in the world, while practising karma yoga. There seems to be an obvious and irreconcilable contradiction between these two viewpoints. But actually there is no contradiction – both ideas say the same thing. The confusion only arises because of wrong interpretation. Some people leave all their material possessions and duties, thinking that this is renunciation. It is not necessary to leave the actions and things of the world. One should try to renounce not the actions or possessions, but attachment to them. This is the meaning of renunciation. It is renouncement of the attachment to objects, not the actual objects or situations themselves. There is a big difference in these two meanings.

Whichever path or paths of yoga you adopt, the initial aim is to relax the mind-body complex, to make it healthy, to reduce the sense of ego and to bring about various other

related, positive changes that we have already mentioned. Some people retire to a quiet place and start to practise hatha yoga and raja yoga. However, as we previously pointed out, this method is only for those who don't have too many inner conflicts or strong ties with the world. There are few people who can do this, for most have responsibilities and no great urge to leave the busy world anyway. Furthermore, it is not necessary to become a hermit; continue your daily activities and practise karma yoga. In both cases, living in solitude or in bustling surroundings, one should develop a sense of renunciation. This is necessary to gain the most from all yogic practices. If a man retires to a cave, with outward renunciation of the world, but with a deep inward longing for worldly objects and enjoyments, then he is fooling himself and will make no progress in his sadhana. This is not renunciation, for he is still very much attached. The path for most people is in and through the world and while practising yoga, including karma yoga. Continue to be involved with the things of the world, for these are part of life and there to be experienced. Why not? But at the same time you must try to become more aware and detached so that the ups and downs of daily life have less influence on you. The aim is to develop a mental attitude so that even grave crises will not shake you in a deeper sense. They may affect you superficially but not overwhelmingly. This does not mean that you should become like a vegetable, or hardened and totally indifferent, but that you accept life as it is, with its conflicts, hardships and apparent unfairness. This is renunciation.

Anyone can start to develop the attitude of renunciation. A king or a beggar can renounce and still live in the world of activity and duties. A king can be surrounded by fabulous wealth and still be totally detached. There were a number of kings in ancient India, such as Ashoka and Janaka, who epitomized renunciation. Conversely, a beggar can be completely attached, even though he has no material belongings. This is the case if he is continually craving objects and pleasures that he does not have – real renunciation is a mental attitude; it is not at all concerned with what one possesses or does not possess.

Does non-attachment or renunciation mean that people will become socially irresponsible?

This is a common question and criticism. No, this will not happen. In fact, exactly the opposite will occur. Those persons who become more detached in the real sense of the word, will become more responsible to society and mankind. The *Bhagavad Gita* makes this point very clear: "... he (who has renounced) delights in the welfare of all creatures" (5:25). In other words, one works better by being detached and so in this way everyone benefits more fully.

In the ashram there are two cars, both good cars. Many people say and think: "How can the sannyasins in the ashram be real swamis because they are still very much attached and absorbed in the material benefits of the world?" This is a total misunderstanding of the idea of renunciation. They fail to realize that there is little or no attachment to the cars in themselves. They are in the ashram merely for utility. Even though they are polished regularly and kept in good order, they are regarded as merely objects to be used. There is no sentimentality and no real attachment. It is the mental attitude that is important. The essence of renunciation is being able to renounce attachment to the objects yet still be involved with them.

This renunciation has to be cultivated and evolved gradually. At first it will be very limited renunciation, and will probably be more intellectual than anything else. There will be little depth of feeling. But as you continue to practise yoga you will find that renunciation will arise spontaneously and with more and more intensity. You will automatically become more detached as you progress along the path of yoga.

In karma yoga, work with total renunciation is called *nishkama karma* – 'selfless work'. Though no fruits are expected, it actually brings the greatest fruits, it brings peace of mind, higher awareness and knowledge.

Notes

- ¹ Bhakti Yoga: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Part 3 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1; Part 4 – Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Shankhaprakshalana

Shankhaprakshalana is a method of evacuating and cleansing the entire alimentary canal, from mouth to anus. In fact, this is the meaning of the word *shankhaprakshalana*. It is such a wonderful technique that it is surprising that it has not been adopted more widely throughout the world. To the best of our knowledge, it is the only systematic, sure and gentle method of thoroughly cleaning the entire digestive system. Though laxatives empty the system, they do so forcibly and cause excessive irritation. Moreover, laxatives do not scrub the whole digestive tract as thoroughly as the moderate method of Shankhaprakshalana.

This practice is also known as *varisar dhauti*. The word *vari* means 'to clean' or 'wash'. It is also called *kaya kalpa* which means a technique to transform the whole body. And indeed it does just this; it improves the condition and health of the entire organism.

Scriptural references

Shankhaprakshalana is mentioned in many of the old yogic texts. However, it is rarely given in detail, for it was intended for practice only under the direct guidance of a teacher or guru. It is totally impossible for one to understand and practise the full technique of shankhaprakshalana by reading traditional yogic texts. For example, one of the most detailed descriptions is given in the *Gheranda Samhita*: "Drink water slowly up to the vocal cord. Move the water in the stomach. Then evacuate it." (1:17)

The text gives no more practical information, though it does give one more verse to extol the benefits of the practice. "Varisar is most secret. It purifies the body. One who perfects this with great effort acquires a divine body." (1:18)

The ancient yogis purposely recorded vague descriptions of this technique and many others. They wanted people to know that the technique existed, yet did not want

people to practise without the direct guidance of an expert. There is a lot of sense in this, for if shankhaprakshalana and other yogic techniques are done incorrectly, they can cause more harm than good. Therefore, the ancient yogis were careful; they encouraged people to be interested, but made it necessary that they seek and find a guru before they could practise the technique. Actually we are breaking tradition here by publishing full details. But we do so with the explicit understanding that we prefer you to practise the technique of shankhaprakshalana under expert guidance. However, we have published details of this technique in order that those people who are unable to find a suitable teacher can practise by themselves. It is such a wonderful and beneficial method of cleansing the body that we would like it made available to as many people as possible and not limited to a few. But we emphasize, if you do practise alone, without tuition, that you must follow the instructions exactly as we have given them. If you don't do this, perhaps disregarding a seemingly inconsequential rule, then you may harm yourself. We have warned you. In the section on food restrictions, we have given an example of how a person can cause harm to himself by breaking a basic rule. Read it carefully.

Having said this, we urge you to try shankhaprakshalana for yourself, with or without guidance.

Preparation

It is advisable to take only a light, semi-liquid diet in the evening and night before shankhaprakshalana.

Don't do any asanas early in the morning before commencing and also do not take any food, tea, coffee, etc. before the practice.

Plenty of hot water should be made available. The amount depends on the number of people intending to do the practice. But a bucket of hot water should be ready before

beginning. There should be one person with you who does not do the practice and he or she can prepare more hot water as it is required. Furthermore, while you are actually doing the practice this extra person can start to prepare the special food which you will eat when you have completed the practice.

Using another bucket, mix this hot water with cold water so that you have a large quantity of lukewarm water. The water should be reasonably warm, but not so warm that you cannot drink it comfortably. Then you must add salt to this water so that the water tastes salty. In other words, don't add too much salt so that the water is undrinkable, but at the same time add enough so that it can be tasted. As a guide, we suggest that you add salt in the proportion of two teaspoonsful per litre of water. This need not be exact. You must use your own discretion. Thoroughly dissolve the salt in the water. The importance of salt has already been explained¹.

A glass should be made available for each person who is doing the practice. Each person is likely to consume more than sixteen glasses of water, so make sure that you have a steady and sufficient supply of warm water.

Wear light and comfortable clothes. In fact, the clothing in which you normally practise asanas would be the most suitable.

Climate

It is important that shankhaprakshalana is practised only when the climatic conditions are not extreme. That is, you should not practise when the weather is very cold. Therefore, if you live in a country with a cold climate you should practise in the summer when the days are warm. This is important for it is easy to chill the stomach and intestines if you practise shankhaprakshalana in cold weather. Similarly, don't practise when the weather is oppressively hot, for this will tend to make you sweat during the practice. Remember, that you will be performing five asanas eight times each, and probably this procedure will be repeated more than eight times (that is, $5 \times 8 \times 8 = 320$ movements). This requires a lot of energy. Therefore, practising in hot conditions will be a most uncomfortable experience. If you live in a hot country, we suggest you practise in the morning and possibly in wintertime.

Surroundings

The best place to practise is in a garden or on a veranda where you are in contact with fresh air. Also make sure that a toilet is reasonably accessible. In the later stages of shankhaprakshalana it becomes a little difficult, to say the least, if you have to run a hundred yards to the nearest toilet. It is not necessary to practise in the toilet, or immediately outside the toilet, but the toilet should be situated reasonably near, within a few seconds walk, so that you can reach it quickly when circumstances demand it. Another point to note is that it is most ill advised for large numbers of people to practise together when there is only one toilet available. This is a catastrophic situation, for you will have twenty people fighting each other to use the same toilet. A good ratio is that there should be one toilet for every two or three people.

Do not treat shankhaprakshalana as a gravely serious affair. Don't start the practice with an attitude of grim determination, for this is a sure way to create tension and prevent free bowel movement. Approach the practice with a feeling of fun and lightheartedness, for this is the way to finish the practice quickly and enjoyably. We have found in the ashram that the practice seems to take much longer, to drag like a long boring speech, if the people involved are cheerless and gloomy. It becomes a chore, a burden to be endured rather than a pleasant, refreshing experience. It is for this reason that we advise that shankhaprakshalana be practised in a jovial and friendly group atmosphere, for it is this setting that makes the practice fun and easy to carry out.

Time

The complete practice of shankhaprakshalana takes two days. This includes about three or four hours for the actual cleansing process, and the remainder of the time for rest. If you cannot spare two days, we suggest that you do not practise, but wait until you have the time available, perhaps during your holidays or do laghoo shankhaprakshalana instead¹. However, if you have a weekend free, without any duties or commitments, we suggest that you practise during this time.

Generally, the best time of the day to begin is about seven o'clock in the morning, but this will depend on the weather.

SHANKHAPRAKSHALANA

Drink 2 glasses of warm salty water as quickly as possible.

If you have difficulty drinking the salt water try to imagine, though it may be difficult, that you are drinking a refreshing cup of tea.

But, don't sip the water – drink it as quickly as possible; if you slowly sip the water it will take you the whole day to finish the practice. And in fact you might not finish at all.

When you have drunk 2 glasses, you must perform the 5 shankhaprakshalana asanas²:

1. Tadasana – 8 times
2. Tiryak tadasana – 8 times
3. Kati chakrasana – 8 times
4. Tiryak bhujangasana – 8 times
5. Udarakarshanasana – 8 times

The asanas must be performed correctly.

Then quickly drink 2 more glasses of salt water. Repeat the 5 asanas 8 times each.

Then drink 2 more glasses of salt water and again perform the 5 asanas 8 times each.

Now you must go to the toilet.

Even though you might not feel any urge to empty the bowels, you must still go.

But, under no circumstances should you strain; merely sit or squat on the toilet for a short time, say a minute or so.

Whether you have a bowel movement or not, it does not matter.

Return to the place of practice.

Drink 2 more glasses of salt water and then perform the asanas again, 8 times each.

Then go to the toilet again.

Don't use any force trying to produce a bowel movement.

Then drink 2 more glasses of water and repeat the asanas.

Again go to the toilet.

Continue in this way – drink salt water; perform the asanas and then go to the toilet – until the end of the practice. After some time, you will have some bowel movement; it may be after 6 glasses, 10 glasses, 16 glasses, 20 glasses or more. The number of glasses is not important some people need many more than others, before they have any results. Don't compare yourself with others under any circumstances. Let them do their practices in their own time. Don't worry if you take much longer to get an initial motion or complete the practice, compared to others.

In your first bowel movement, you will probably evacuate solid stool.

Continue to drink the salt water and do your asanas.

Eventually, you will find that you start to evacuate a mixture of stool and water with each bowel movement.

Continue to drink the water and do your asanas.

As you progress, you will find that you excrete more and more water and less solid stool; towards the end of the practice, in fact, you will merely release a brown or yellow liquid.

Continue to drink water and do the asanas.

Continue the practice until you emit perfectly clean water.

This is a sure sign that your intestines are perfectly clean, probably the cleanest they have been ever since you were born.

Take 2 more glasses of water; practise the asanas, and again go to the toilet; this will make sure that your intestines are in the best and cleanest condition.

This is the end of the cleansing practice.

Some people finish very quickly while others take as long as 4 hours.

On the average, between 16 and 25 glasses of salt water must be taken before perfectly clean water is evacuated. Some will take even less and some will take more.

Supplementary techniques

Though not compulsory, we recommend that the following two practices be done immediately after completing shankhaprakshalana:

1. Kunjal kriya³
2. Jala neti⁴

In the ashram we always finish shankhaprakshalana with these two practices, for we have found it gives the best possible cleanliness of the entire digestive tract. First practise kunjal kriya, then jala neti.

Thirst

After completing shankhaprakshalana and the supplementary practices, you may feel thirsty. But you must not drink any water for at least three hours; all other drinks are also prohibited. This is important for various reasons. If you drink cold water then this will tend to chill the digestive system, especially since the digestive system has been scrubbed super clean. Furthermore, immediately after

completing the practice, the body sets to work reproducing a new protective layer on the stomach and intestinal wall; this is supplemented by the ghee from the food you will shortly eat. If you drink water then you will tend to dilute and further scrub away the new protective film.

Rest immediately after completing practice.

When you have completed shankhaprakshalana and the two supplementary practices then you should take complete rest for forty-five minutes. Don't sleep; merely sit quietly. If you wish you may lie down, but we emphasize that you take care not to fall asleep. If you do sleep you may get a thumping headache. This short period of time is important for your whole digestive system to take a well-earned rest. Rarely does your digestive system take total rest, for it is almost continually digesting food. Even when it is not digesting food, it does not completely rest, for then it takes the opportunity to clean out the digestive tract of debris, impurities and waste particles of food. This forty-five minutes is a time for the digestive system to revitalize itself.

During this period of rest you might find that you need to excrete more water from the bowels. Don't worry this is normal.

Preparation of special food

While you are resting after shankhaprakshalana, another person who has not done the practice should be preparing the special food for you to eat. You should not prepare the food yourself, you should only rest.

The food must be prepared from rice (white or brown), pulses (mung dal) or lentils, cooked with ghee (clarified butter). This is known as *khichari*. The rice should be of high quality and easily digestible. In some countries, pulses or lentils, and ghee may be difficult to obtain, but they are available in a well-stocked health food shop. Make sure that the pulses or lentils are also good quality and easily digestible.

Sufficient food must be prepared to fill each person, who has done shankhaprakshalana. That is, each person must eat a sufficient amount to replace the volume of food that has been removed from the digestive system by the salt water.

The rice and lentils can be cooked in water together until they are soft. Simultaneously

the ghee can be warmed and melted. When the rice and lentils are cooked, a little salt and turmeric (*haldi*) can be added if necessary, though this is not essential. Then mix in ghee abundantly so that the final preparation is reasonably liquid.

This special food is absolutely necessary to gently and effectively relubricate the whole digestive tract. Remember, shankhaprakshalana does not only remove all waste matter from the digestive system, but it also removes all the natural mucus layers from the intestinal walls. Therefore, after the cleansing practice, the walls of the digestive tract are completely bare. The ghee, in reasonable quantities (hence the mushy food preparation), is essential to replace the natural film on the intestinal walls with a temporary coating. Of course, the body will eventually produce a new layer but this takes a little time. It is a completely abnormal condition for the intestines to be without this protective coating and also to be empty. Therefore, it is essential to eat a reasonable amount of *khichari*. The ghee provides a temporary film on the wall, while the rice provides a simple, digestible packing material. The lentils supplement this diet by giving the body an easily digestible source of protein.

A further factor is that rice (especially white rice, we are told) tends to create mucus. This, of course, is just what is needed after shankhaprakshalana in order to protect the inner lining of the alimentary canal. *Khichari* must also be prepared for the evening meal.

When to eat

Each person who has done shankhaprakshalana should eat the *khichari* preparation after taking his forty-five minutes rest. If a large group of people do the practice, it is certain that each person will take their food at different times. Don't allow more than one hour to elapse after finishing shankhaprakshalana before eating your food.

Each person should take the same diet of *khichari* in the evening. Make sure that you eat sufficient food to fill your stomach. You may not feel like eating, but you must take food, for this is necessary to quickly reline and fill your intestines. Without its natural lining, the intestines are very vulnerable to infection, so make sure that you take plenty of ghee.

Subsequent rest

Having eaten your food, you should take further rest. However, it is important that you don't sleep for at least three hours. You will be tempted to sleep, but try not to. If you do sleep you will pay the penalty. One practitioner, when he first did shankhaprakshalana was fast asleep within five minutes after taking food. Even though he was advised otherwise, he could not resist the overwhelming temptation to sleep. He did not sleep for a few hours, or even eight hours. He slept from about midday on the day of the practice, throughout the whole afternoon, the whole night, until noon the following day, and even when he woke up, it was because someone woke him. He felt very groggy and wanted to continue sleeping; even for the rest of the day, he wanted to do nothing but lie down and sleep. Of course, this is only one experience, there are many other different ones. We have known of some people who, contrary to advice, have gone to sleep too early, and who have felt grogginess and lethargy for the next few days. For some reason or another, premature sleep seems to lead to a long period of physical lethargy.

So don't sleep for at least three hours after taking food, if you don't want to be sluggish during the rest of the day and the following day. For three hours you should rest without doing any physical or mental work. After this time has elapsed, you may sleep if you wish. In this way you will avoid any side-effects.

Food restrictions

These apply for one week – no less. If you cannot abide by these food restrictions, we suggest that you do not practise shankhaprakshalana.

You should avoid the following foods: chemically processed, synthetic, pungent, acidic and non-vegetarian foods. This includes alcohol, cigarettes, tea, coffee, soft drinks, milk, butter-milk, yoghurt, spices and any characteristically acidic fruits such as lemons, oranges, grape-fruit, pineapple, etc.

You must eat a simple, pure and reasonably neutral (that is not overacidic) diet. You may include most foods such as rice, wheat, bread, most types of fruits and vegetables with low acid content, nuts, lentils, pulses, soybeans, etc. You must use your discretion and common sense in this respect. Remember you have

cleansed the whole digestive system. If you eat the wrong food it may have adverse reactions on the digestive tract, so make sure that you follow closely the diet we have indicated. Furthermore, make sure the food is clean, well cooked (if this is necessary) and not poisonous. After shankhaprakshalana your digestive system is more vulnerable to unsuitable, bad or dirty food, so take extra care to protect your body, following the instructions we have given. To further emphasize this important point, here is an example of a person who did not follow these regulations. He did shankhaprakshalana under guidance, and was warned not to take unsuitable food for one week. But he was very fond of richly cooked pancakes, so the day after the practice, he passed by a pancake shop with a rich display of tasty pancakes in the window. They looked so nice covered in a thick coating of syrup. He knew it was not advisable to eat even one pancake, but he shrugged his shoulders and thought "I did the practice yesterday, today is another day; one, two or perhaps three pancakes won't do any harm." And he went ahead and ate the pancakes enjoying them very much. But for the following month his whole digestive system was completely out of balance. He found it difficult to eat any type of food, and when he did, he merely suffered from diarrhoea and nausea. It was a distressing month, caused by indulgence at the wrong time. Eventually he had to resort to fasting to bring his body back to normal. Had he waited a week before taking his pancakes, no problems would have arisen. So we emphasize that for one week you must use your discretion in the food that you eat.

There is one more factor that we would like to point out: the whole aim of doing shankhaprakshalana is to clean out the poisons and accumulated waste from the digestive system. Therefore, if you start to load the digestive system with the wrong food after doing the practice, you have defeated the whole purpose of this cleansing technique. You have wasted your time. So if you do shankhaprakshalana and you want to gain the most benefits from the practice, then take great care to follow the diet restrictions.

Asana practice and other physical activities

You should not do your regular asana program on the day you perform shankhaprakshalana,

or the following day. A lot of energy must be expended to practise shankhaprakshalana asanas, so it is important to give your body a rest. That is, you may continue your asanas on the second day after doing the practice. For two days also avoid excessive mental and physical activities.

Caution

The rules of shankhaprakshalana are extensive. There is a valid reason, however, for each rule and they should be carried out without fail. If you disregard even one rule, you may experience harmful or disagreeable consequences, which is a great pity, for this technique can give so many benefits.

Frequency

This is quite a long and complex practice. Therefore, normally, you should not practise more than twice a year. That is, you should allow six months to elapse before doing shankhaprakshalana for a second time. Under special circumstances however, it may be necessary to repeat the practice after a short time has elapsed, perhaps in the case of a person who has chronic constipation. But don't do it without seeking expert guidance.

Limitations

This practice is not to be done by people who suffer from peptic or duodenal ulcers. People with high blood pressure should not practise alone, but should seek proper guidance.

Benefits

Shankhaprakshalana purifies the whole body. There is no medicine or method (apart from a prolonged fast) that can clean the small and large intestines so thoroughly as this practice.

Many diseases are directly or indirectly caused by accumulation of toxic waste matter in the intestines. This practice expels all impurities from the digestive tract and thereby helps to purify the blood system. This can result in a wonderful and noticeable improvement in general health as well as helping to remove specific ailments. In particular, it has been found useful for the treatment of diabetes, hyperacidity, constipation, dysentery and many other ailments connected with impure blood such as bad complexion and excessive occurrence of boils or pimples.

Those people who feel healthy can also do the practice, for they can improve their health, making them feel lighter, more cheerful and exhilarated with life. Furthermore, it will help to make their minds sharper.

This is also a very important practice for those people who intend to perform intensive yogic techniques for higher awareness. For example, we always insist that people who come to the ashram to do a concentrated course of spiritual practices for a fixed length of time (*anushthana*) should first of all do shankhaprakshalana. We have found that in this way they gain the most benefits from the course and their practices. Shankhaprakshalana, by purifying the body, helps greatly to make the mind and body more receptive to higher vibrations.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1; Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

There are a number of asanas which are performed from the standing position. The following group is specially chosen as being some of the most useful of the standing asanas. One of the great advantages of these standing asanas is that they can be practised at any time or any place without formality. Of course, we don't expect you to start practising in the middle of the office or factory floor, but you can go to a quiet place to practise them without any preparation. Many people who sit at a desk, machine or in any one place during their work for long periods of time, will find the following asanas most useful for encouraging good blood circulation, eliminating aches and pains in the back, neck and throughout the whole body.

TRIKONASANA (TRIANGLE POSE)

The word *tri* means 'three' and the word *kona* means 'angle'. Therefore, *trikonasana* can be translated as the 'three-angle pose'. However, it is usually called the 'triangle pose'.

There are five distinct movements involved in the whole practice. They all start from the same standing position – that is, with the legs wide apart.

Movement 1

Stand erect with your feet about 1 metre apart. Raise your arms sideways to shoulder height; that is, your arms and shoulders should form one straight line.

This is the starting position.

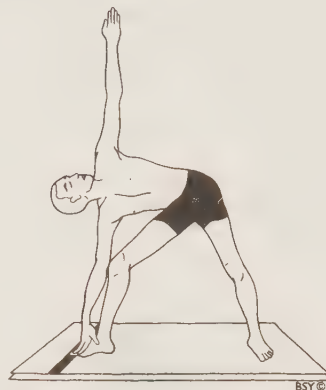
Slowly lean to the right and bring the right hand to the right toe.

During this movement you may bend your right leg slightly.

Your arms should remain in one straight line, with your head facing forwards.

Don't bend forwards.

This is important; you should bend as much as possible to the side.



To do this, you may push the left side of your pelvis slightly forwards.

Your arms, legs and the whole body should lie in one vertical plane.

When your right hand touches your right foot, your left hand should simultaneously point directly upwards.

To complete the movement, turn the head upwards and gaze at your left hand.

This is the final position and is shown above.

Return to the standing position, performing the movements in reverse sequence.

Make sure you keep your arms in one straight line throughout the entire movement.

Repeat the same movement, but leaning to the left.

Then return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: exhale while bending the body to the side and inhale while straightening the body and returning to the starting position.

Movement 2

Repeat the same procedure as movement 1, as far as the point where you touch your right foot with your right hand, your head facing forwards.

In this position your left arm should be vertical.

Slowly swing your left arm downwards over the left side of your head.

In the final position, your left arm should be horizontal and touching your left ear.

Remember, you must try not to bend forwards but take great care to keep your whole body in one vertical plane.

To accentuate the influence of the asana, imagine you are trying to touch the opposite wall with your left hand.

Slowly return to the starting position.

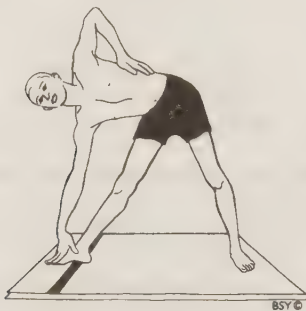
Repeat on the other side, leaning the body to the left.

Return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: same as given for movement 1.



Movement 3

Stand in the same position as for movement 1.

Place your palms on either side of the waist.

This is the starting position.

You must face forwards throughout the whole practice, keeping your legs, arms, trunk and head as much as possible in one vertical plane.

Lean to the right side, while slowly sliding the right hand down the right hip and leg, towards the right foot.

Simultaneously raise your left hand upwards towards the armpit, keeping the palm in contact with the side of your chest.

Don't strain, but try to touch your right foot with your right hand.

This is the final position.

Try to resist the temptation to bend your body forwards – the bend should be sideways from the waist.

Slowly return to the starting position, bringing your right hand upwards and pushing your left hand downwards to resume their original position at the side of the waist.

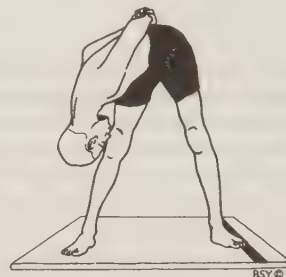
Now bend the body to the left side, repeating the same procedure.

Return to the starting position.

This is 1 round.

Do a few more rounds.

Breathing: same as given for movement 1.



Movement 4

Stand with your feet at least 1 metre apart; in fact, as wide as possible.

Place your hands behind your back and hold your left wrist with your right hand.

This is the starting position.

Twist the hips to the right, keeping the feet in the same position.

Slowly bend to the right side.

To some extent you will have to bend forwards; however, try to bend as much as possible to the side, keeping your trunk and legs in one straight line.

Try to touch the right knee with your nose.

If necessary, you can bend your right leg slightly at the knee.

This is the final position; hold for a second or so.

Return to the starting position.

Repeat exactly the same procedure on the left side of the body.

This is 1 round. Do a number of rounds.

Breathing: inhale deeply in the starting position. Exhale slowly as you bend your body.

Retain the breath in the final position and inhale while returning to the starting position.

Movement 5

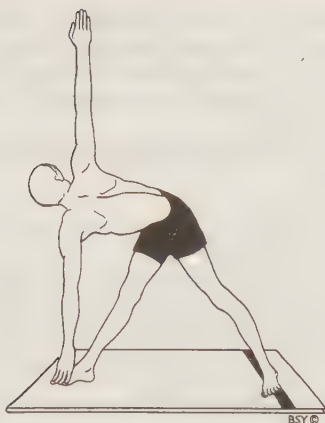
Stand erect with your feet about 1 metre apart.

Extend your arms horizontally to each side.

Bend forward at the waist so that your head, trunk and arms lie in one horizontal plane.

Look forwards.

Swivel your trunk to the right and touch your right foot with your left hand.



Allow your arms to swivel so that when your left hand touches your right foot, your right arm points upwards.

At the end of the movement, twist your head and look upwards at your right hand.

This is the final position.

Stay in the final position for a second or so.

Then swivel your trunk in the opposite direction, touching your right hand to your left foot.

Twist your body in this way a number of times. Then face forward and return to the starting position.

Breathing: inhale while raising your arms to the horizontal position in the initial standing position. Exhale as you lean forwards. Hold your breath while twisting your body to each side. Breathe in as you resume the standing position. Breathe out as you lower your arms.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Awareness

Maintain awareness of the movement and the breathing.

All movements should be performed as smoothly as possible without excessive jerking.

Number of rounds

This depends on the time you have available. Try to do three to five rounds of each movement.

Sequence

The practice of trikonasana consists of the five movements we have described. They should preferably be done in the sequence we have

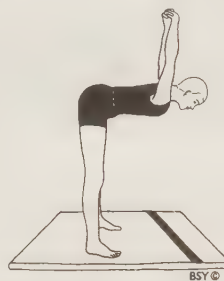
given, one after the other. However, if you lack time or particularly like one of the movements, there is absolutely no reason why you cannot practise any one or more of the movements for a longer period of time.

Benefits

All the movements have a wonderful influence in the region of the waist. The entire nervous system is toned up, especially the spinal nerves. It loosens up the muscles and joints of the whole body; in fact, we can say it is a compound asana that systematically revitalizes the entire body.

DWIKONASANA (DOUBLE ANGLE POSE)

The word *dwi* means 'two' and *kona* means 'angle'. Therefore, this is known as 'the double angle pose'.



Technique

Stand erect with your legs one foot apart.

Place your hands behind your back.

Interlock your fingers.

Without straining, twist your arms, so that the palms face outwards away from the body; the hands should remain interlocked.

This is the starting position.

Bend forwards from the waist while simultaneously bringing your arms upwards behind your back.

Furthermore, you should try to bring your arms upwards as much as possible, but don't strain.

The arms will act as a lever, and will accentuate the stretch given to the shoulders and the chest.

Stay in the final position for a few seconds, pushing the arms upwards as far as you can. Then return to the starting position allowing the arms to hang downwards and relax completely.

This is 1 round.
Do further rounds according to available time.

Breathing and awareness

Exhale as you bend forwards. Inhale as you return to the starting position. Hold your breath in the final pose.

Awareness should be on the movement, breathing and applying an accentuated stretch to the chest and shoulders in the final position.

Number of rounds

Up to a maximum of ten rounds, according to the available time, is a reasonable number.

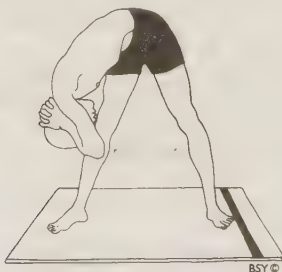
Benefits

This asana gives a wonderful stretch to the chest, thereby loosening up the associated muscles and nerves.

It also helps to tone up the nerves and muscles of the spine in the region of the neck, helping to increase the circulation in this area. It loosens up the shoulder joints and is a good asana for removing stiffness in the upper back and neck.

DOLASANA (PENDULUM POSE)

The Sanskrit word *dol* means 'to swing' or 'to oscillate'. Therefore this asana can be called 'the swinging pose' or 'the pendulum pose'.



Technique

Stand erect with your feet about 1 metre apart. Raise your arms and interlock your fingers behind your neck.

Point your elbows sideways.

Twist the upper part of your body to the right, keeping your feet firmly fixed on the ground. Bend forwards and touch your head to your right knee.

Remaining in the bent position, swing your head and try to touch your left knee.

Then swing back again to the right knee.

Repeat this swinging movement 3 times in each direction.

Then return to the standing position and face forward.

This is 1 round.

Repeat another round, but this time first of all bending to the left.

Try not to bend your legs throughout the whole practice. Even if you are unable to touch your head to your knees, you can still do the practice, bending only as far forwards as your body flexibility will allow.

Breathing and awareness

Exhale as you bend forwards. Hold your breath while you perform the swinging motion. Breathe in as you raise your body.

Keep awareness on the physical movement, breathing and relaxation of the lower back muscles.

Number of rounds

Do at least three rounds.

Benefits

This asana gives the same basic benefits as *trikonasana*, though it has a specific influence on the spinal nerves and muscles of the lower back. It is an excellent preparatory asana for the more difficult forward bending asanas, such as *paschimottanasana*¹ and *janu sirshasana*² which require a reasonably high degree of flexibility in the region of the lower back.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana (Stage 4)

At this stage in your pranayama practice you should start to practise outer retention. That is, it is time to supplement inhalation, exhalation and inner retention (antar kumbhaka) with retention of the breathing process when the lungs are deflated as much as is possible. In Sanskrit, this stage is known as *bahir kumbhaka*, or sometimes *bahiranga kumbhaka*.

Bahir kumbhaka is a very important part of pranayama practices and will bestow many benefits. However, as we have already emphasized, you must slowly develop the capacity to retain the breath externally. Don't try to hold the breath for too long in the beginning, even if at first it may seem easy. This applies particularly to outer retention, for this is a function that the lungs and associated nerves are rarely required to carry out. Each of us has held his or her breath many times, but almost invariably it is with an initial intake of air beforehand. That is, we generally take a deep inhalation before holding the breath. This applies in many sports, such as swimming. We do not normally empty the lungs immediately prior to holding the breath, but fill them to maximum capacity. Thus people are more accustomed to inner retention.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 4 BAHIR KUMBHAKA

You should continue the same ratio of breathing that we gave in the previous lesson¹, but add the new mode of *bahir kumbhaka* to it. The ratio will be 1:8:6:1:1:8:6:1 made up as follows:

Inhale through left nostril (pooraka)	1
Retain breath internally (antar kumbhaka)	8
Exhale through right nostril (rechaka)	6
Retain breath externally (bahir kumbhaka)	1
Inhale through right nostril	1
Retain breath internally	8
Exhale through left nostril	6
Retain breath externally	1

This is one round. Each round should be done in the same manner, one after the other.

Remember, the ratio we have given corresponds to the actual relative durations of inhalation, exhalation and both inner and outer retention. That is, if you breathe in for a count of 5 (seconds), for example, then you should retain internally for a count of 40, exhale for a count of 30 – and externally retain for a count of 5. This is one example. Only you will know your own capability, and you must set the duration of each stage in accordance with the given ratio to suit your proficiency. Whether you inhale for a count of 1, 2 or 10 seconds, there should be absolutely no strain.

Practical hint

You will find the practice is much easier to execute if you breathe out very slightly, immediately before releasing *bahir kumbhaka*. That is, when you have completed *bahir kumbhaka*, you should exhale slightly before inhaling. This will help to release the kind of lock that the lungs take after a duration of outer kumbhaka. This small trick brings the lungs and the associated nerves smoothly into operation once more to draw air into the body.

This little stratagem can also be used at the end of inner retention. That is, after completing inner retention you can breathe in very slightly before exhaling.

Awareness

Make sure that you maintain awareness of both breathing and mental counting. This is essential in order to make the mind relaxed and one-pointed.

Warning

Once again, we would like to emphasize that you should make sure that no irregularities occur. If you notice any negative mental or physical repercussions as a result of practising pranayama, then seek advice.

Another point to remember is that those people who have any serious physical or mental imbalance must take care before attempting to practise pranayama, especially the higher stages. In this category we include those people who have high blood pressure, people who are extremely neurotic and so on.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 4

Meditation: Aum Chanting

The meditation practice we will now describe is Aum chanting. It is possible to write an encyclopaedia on this subject, but in accordance with the electrifying brevity of the mantra Aum, we will try to reduce verbose details to a minimum. If so much can be said and inferred in the short, simple sound of Aum, then we will also try not to cause mental constipation by giving overelaborate explanations. In fact, the only thing that needs to be said is: A-A-A-A-A-U-U-U-U-U-U-M-M-M-M-M-M

This practice is so simple to explain yet the benefits and experience that it can bring are profound. The mantra Aum is the king of mantras. Experience of the meaning of Aum leads automatically to the fullest understanding of all other mantras, which are generally limited in that they are intended for specific purposes or for particular types of people. Aum on the other hand is totally non-specific. It can be practised by everyone.

The mantra Aum is not merely a mono-syllable. It is a sound that has been realized by the ancient rishis in the highest states of meditation. It is for this reason that continuous and intense awareness of Aum can in turn take the spiritual aspirant to the same states as the ancients who realized it.

Aum according to the Mandukya Upanishad The *Mandukya Upanishad* is a well-known ancient text that is concerned solely with the meaning and significance of Aum. It says that: "The syllable Aum is the universe. It is Brahman (the absolute). It is time – past, present and future. It is also that which transcends time."

Then it continues: "This Self, which is one with Aum, has three aspects; and beyond these there is the undefinable . . . the Fourth."

Then it proceeds to assign meanings to the three different parts of the Aum mantra and for Aum as an indivisible whole. These are summarized as follows, with correspondence on the microcosmic and the macrocosmic level:

It is the cosmic mantra Aum that unites the limited existence with the unlimited. It is Aum that merges the microcosm with the macrocosm, the individual with the universal. Aum acts as the bridge. The text concludes by saying: "The fourth, the Self, is Aum. It is unutterable and beyond the mind. In it, the universe is enveloped . . . whosoever really knows Aum, the Self, becomes the Self."

If the reader is interested refer to this short (12 verse) Upanishad in the original. However, we emphasize that it is important not to become too attached to concepts regarding

Microcosm	Macrocosm	State of Experience
Syllable 'A' Individual physical body	material universe	wakeful state; perception only of the external world through the senses
Syllable 'U' Individual mind	cosmic mind	dream state; perception of mental impressions
Syllable 'M' Intuitive awareness at individual level	consciousness substratum of universe	deep sleep; experience of bliss and revelatory knowledge
Syllable 'AUM' as a whole Atman (Self)	Brahman	fourth state (turiya); beyond all conceptualization

Aum, for actually the real meaning of Aum is impossible to put into words. All the numerous meanings assigned to it are superficial for they are mere words, which tend to distort the real significance. The syllables A, U, M are also said to represent Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the sustainer) and Shiva (the dissolver) as well as many other things. But actually the meaning of Aum can only be known by personal realization. And then one cannot even speak about its meaning . . . one becomes speechless. It is impossible to explain the meaning of Aum rationally. It is beyond intellectual concepts.

Other scriptural references

There are a vast number of other Indian scriptures which also mention the cosmic Aum. They all speak of it in glowing terms. The following are a few selected quotations: "Those who want enlightenment should reflect on the sound and meaning of Aum. Aum is the indestructible Brahman. Aum is the bow, the individual being is the arrow and Brahman is the target. When the arrow is released from the bow it goes straight towards and into the target. Like this, the sadhaka (spiritual aspirant) should reflect on Aum and thereby merge with Brahman." (*DhyanaBindu Upanishad*)

"Fire, though potentially present in firewood, is not seen until one stick is rubbed against another. The Self is like that fire; it is realized by constant awareness of the sacred syllable Aum. Let your body be the stick that is rubbed and Aum be the stick that is rubbed against it. Thus you will realize your real nature, which is hidden within, just as fire, in a sense, is hidden in wood." (*Shwetashwatar Upanishad*)

"Aum is the holy sound of the universe. It is the sound form of the Self." (*Maitri Upanishad*)

Aum is mentioned in numerous other traditional yogic scriptures: the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Yoga Vasishtha* as well as many of the tantric texts.

Don't make the mistake of assuming that Aum is confined to Indian spiritual systems. It is found in the Islamic faith in the slightly modified form of Amin; it is also found in the religions of Judaism and Christianity in the form of Amen. It does not take much imagination to see that these mantras have the same root. Also it is said in the ancient Indian scriptures that Aum is the first cause of the

material universe, it is the power of Brahman (the absolute) through which the universe is created. It is the shakti of tantra. In the Gospel according to St. John, in the very first verse it says: "In the beginning was the word (Aum) and the word was with God (Brahman) and the word was God . . ."

This is exactly the same as the utterances of the ancient rishis, recorded for posterity in the *Upanishads* and other Indian scriptures. Compare this previous biblical statement with the following quotation: "This word (Aum) is verily Brahman. It is the highest. He who knows its meaning and worships it attains the supreme goal and knows everything." (*Katha Upanishad*)

From this and other selected verses we have given previously you will realize that we are talking about exactly the same thing. We could go on, but will stop at this point. All we want to say is that Aum is truly the universal mantra. It is far better to start chanting Aum and reflect on its meaning yourself than to become deluded by verbal knowledge. In this manner you will be on the path to finding out the real meaning of Aum, the meaning that cannot be conveyed by any book. If you do this there will be absolutely no need to read about Aum.

Pronunciation

Aum can be chanted slowly or quickly. Each method is as good as the other and you must experiment yourself to find out your own preference. If it is chanted quickly, then it is a powerful method to synchronize it with the heartbeat. In this manner, you can feel Aum resonating throughout the whole body in tune with the natural heart rate. Under these circumstances, Aum seems to chant itself; if you wish you can imagine Aum emanating from the heart region. Another excellent method is to coordinate the Aum chanting with the pulse at the eyebrow centre. This again is very powerful and very conducive to introspection and relaxation, and eventually meditation. Fast Aum chanting is best done mentally and not verbally, for loud chanting will tend to drown out perception of the heartbeat or pulse.

If Aum is chanted slowly it can be made to last for many seconds, depending on the capacity of the individual. There should be a definite pronunciation of each of the syllables 'A', 'U' and 'M', with a gradual transition from one to the other. The syllable 'A' is pronounced

like 'AH' or 'a' in the word 'palm'. The syllable 'U' is pronounced 'oo' as in the word 'room'. The syllable 'M' is not sounded by moving the lips like the usual 'm' sound. It is sounded after 'A' and 'U' like a humming sound: 'm-m-m-m-m-m-m-m-m'. This humming sound can be extended for as long as the practitioner wishes, but normally the 'M' sound should gradually taper off at the end of the chant.

Long Aum chanting can be both mental or verbal, though for most purposes verbal chanting is to be preferred. This particularly applies to beginners, for loud chanting or group chanting tends to more effectively calm a disturbed mind. And because most people have a mind that is in a continual state of conflict and turmoil, verbal chanting of Aum is generally preferable and most suitable for the majority of people. In a sense it overwhelms one's mental attention. One is almost forced to concentrate on the sound and pronunciation of Aum, and the mind tends to forget its usual worries and mental distractions. This is why verbal Aum chanting is recommended for beginners, if it is possible. If it is likely to create problems by disturbing others in your house, then of course you must practise mental repetition of Aum.

As you make progress in yoga, then you can practise more and more mental Aum chanting, for this is most conducive to introspection, once your mind is reasonably relaxed. A particularly good practice is to first of all chant Aum verbally for sometime (the longer the better) and then change over to mental Aum chanting. This is a systematic method of withdrawing your awareness from the outside world and directing it inwards to explore the mind. It also systematically calms the mind.

You should pronounce Aum, whether mentally or verbally, so that it is a harmonious sound. It should come naturally without being forced. It is through continuous, melodious sound that the mind will become relaxed. It should be: "Like the continuous flow of an oil stream and like the vibration of a bell. This is the way to pronounce Aum and the way to really know the meaning of the Vedas." (*Dhyanabindu Upanishad*)

The pronunciation is so important. If you are still not sure then we suggest that you go to a local yoga school or ashram to hear the sound of Aum from people with experience.

Awareness

Ideally one should be aware of the following two things while practising Aum chanting:

1. The sound, whether mental or verbal;
2. Reflection on the meaning of Aum.

To do the two at the same time may be a little difficult at first, but if you can do this you will achieve the best results. If you wish you can be aware of one of the following during your practice: either the sound combined with its meaning; the sound combined with concentration on the symbol; or concentration on the symbol combined with reflection on its meaning. Choose for yourself through experimentation, or contact a competent person for advice as to what is most suitable for you.

If you simultaneously practise *trataka* on Aum, then the image can be external or internal, depending upon your capacity of visualization. The best is internal concentration on the symbol of Aum, but it is a little difficult for beginners. It is difficult to hold a steady image for a long period of time.

If you concentrate on an external symbol of Aum you can use any that are available, or one that you may feel inspired to draw for yourself. It should not be too large, for the aim is to focus the awareness on a limited field of attention. You can alternate external *trataka* with internal *trataka*, while simultaneously practising Aum chanting¹.

If you concentrate on an internal image of the symbol of Aum, then you can create it in the space in front of the closed eyes or you can create it at the heart centre as suggested by the *Dhyanabindu Upanishad*: "Concentrate on Aum at the heart centre as though it is a candle flame the same size as your thumb." Make sure that you continue Aum chanting with awareness.

It is not compulsory to practise *trataka* on the symbol of Aum. If you wish you can remain aware only of the sound. This alone is very powerful and will quickly soothe away the tensions of the mind. This method is particularly useful for those people who have trouble practising *trataka*.

AUM CHANTING

Little needs to be said about the practice for it is so simple and we have already explained most of the relevant points. The following

brief description is for awareness of only the sound of Aum. The reader can integrate concentration on the symbol of Aum and reflection on the meaning for himself if he wishes.

Sit in a comfortable asana and close the eyes. Start to intonate Aum, either slowly or quickly. Let the chanting be aloud if this is convenient. Try to be aware completely of the sound of Aum. Lose your whole being in Aum.

Let the sound emanate from your whole being. Feel as though your whole body and mind is resonating in harmony with the sound.

Imagine that you are simultaneously the transmitter and the receiver of Aum.

You are like a radio station.

Be totally aware of Aum.

Continue in this manner for as long as possible (at least 15 minutes is reasonable).

Then stop Aum chanting and be aware of the pulse at the eyebrow centre.

When you can distinctly detect it, synchronize it with the mental sound of Aum.

Be aware of the internal sound of Aum at the eyebrow centre, vibrating in harmony with the pulse.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time.

End the practice by chanting Aum loudly 3 times.

Duration

Many people practise this simple yet powerful technique for hours. In fact some people try to maintain awareness of the mental sound of Aum continuously, whether they are working, playing, eating or sleeping. It can take one to profound meditation experiences. Practise for as long as available time will permit.

Reflection

This is a method of jnana yoga and can be practised by those people who have good concentration and determination. If you really want to know the meaning of Aum from the depths of your heart, then you will find it. It may take one week, one month, one year or many years, but the meaning will come. It will come like the crash of thunder, it will be like 'crashing through the sound barrier'. And when you know its meaning, through personal experience, then your whole being will change, for you will know the impossible.

Benefits

The benefits are profound. Firstly, it is one of the most powerful methods of rapidly relaxing the entire mind and body. As such, it quickly brings mental peace and can help very much to prevent or soothe away many psychosomatic disorders. Whenever you feel tense, depressed, angry or any other negative emotions, then you should practise Aum chanting. Though it is a simple practice it can lead to high states of meditation and realizations of higher truths. Little more needs to be said.

Integration with other meditative practices

This is not the last you will hear of Aum, for it is widely integrated with many other meditation techniques. In fact, all meditative practices can be profitably started and ended with Aum chanting. It is an important part of kriya yoga, where it is intimately combined with yogic techniques.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

Daily Practice Program

You can now practise Aum chanting as a meditative technique in its own right, or you can integrate it with trataka in the manner that we have described. Aum chanting immediately prior to your regular meditative practice will help very much to relax the mind and ending your meditation session with Aum chanting makes a final powerful impact. You should fit in Aum chanting in the way that you feel is most suitable.

The more you practise, the longer you practise and the more regularly you practise, corresponds directly with the amount of benefits that you will obtain.

The new stage of bahir kumbhaka should now be integrated with your pranayama practice if you have reached proficiency in performing the pranayama practice described in the previous lesson.

If you have intestinal problems or feel you need a thorough cleaning of the digestive tract, then you should seriously think about spending two days doing shankhaprakshalana. As we have pointed out, you can practise by yourself, but it is preferable to carry out the cleansing process under expert guidance.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1½ hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Trikonasana	3 each part	10
Dwikonasana	5 rounds	3
Dolasana	3 rounds	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	14
Aum chanting with Trataka		30
		90

Program 2: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	3 rounds	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Trikonasana	3 each part	9
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	12
Aum chanting with Trataka		18
		60

Program 3: duration $\frac{3}{4}$ hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Trikonasana	2 each part	6
Shashankasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
Aum chanting	—	15
		45

Program 4: duration $\frac{1}{2}$ hour (for general health) is the same as the above Program 3 excluding the practice of Aum chanting.

Book II

Advanced Practices

Lesson 13

Doors of Perception

O Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person? The light of the sun, O king, said he, by the light of the sun indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, O Yajnavalkya.

O Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person after the sun has set? The moon indeed becomes the light. By the light of the moon indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, O Yajnavalkya.

O Yajnavalkya, which is the light of the person when the sun and moon have set? Fire indeed is his light. By the light of the fire indeed one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

So is it indeed, O Yajnavalkya.

O Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person, when the sun and the moon have set and the fire is put out? Speech indeed is his light. By the light of the speech indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back. Hence, O king, even when one's hand cannot be distinguished, then wherever speech sounds, one can approach there.

So is it indeed, O Yajnavalkya.

O Yajnavalkya, which is the light of this person, when the sun and moon have set, fire has gone out, speech has been hushed? The Self indeed is his light. By the light of the Self indeed, one sits, walks about, does the work and comes back.

—*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*

Karma Yoga (Part 2)

Karma yoga means meditative dynamism – a simple definition, yet with profound implications. One must be wide awake, and yet not conscious of the little self. One must forget oneself, while simultaneously being involved in intense activity. The body and mind perform multitudinous actions, yet one remains in a state of contemplation, of meditative awareness. This is the ideal, but it cannot occur by thinking about it – practice and effort are necessary.

It is very easy, however, to deceive yourself into thinking that you are practicing karma yoga, whereas it is really false karma yoga. This leads to delusion and there is absolutely no change in your being. Many people perform various types of philanthropic work: they donate huge sums of money to trusts and benevolent societies, or they organize charities, social services, etc. Of course, these acts bring many material benefits to others; in this sense they are positive and worthwhile actions. But at the same time, these benefactors don't necessarily achieve meditative experiences. Why? The reason is simple: they are often doing 'selfless work' for a selfish purpose, for an ulterior end, perhaps for admiration or status.

Certainly this is not karma yoga, no matter how good the social repercussions. It is not necessary to be a welfare or social worker to practise karma yoga. One must merely do the work in hand with as little sense of ego as possible, whether it is farming, nursing, engineering, office work or whatever. It is the attitude and feeling, not the action itself that is important. When work is done for a higher or spiritual purpose then it becomes karma yoga; if not then it is merely work. A tribesman kills an animal for food, while a hunter often kills an animal for sport. The action is the same, but the motive is different. It is the same with karma yoga – the attitude must be changed, but not necessarily the

action. Changing the actions and work without a change in attitude will never lead to any significant experience.

Action and inaction

This is a subject that is commonly misunderstood and is the cause of much confusion. Some people emphatically state that karma (work) is the cause of bondage; that it is action that prevents spiritual illumination. On the other hand, it is also said that karma or work is absolutely necessary for spiritual progress. Some people advise one to stop work and do nothing, while others say that one should work incessantly. This confusion arises, as is usually the case, by a limited, literal and over-intellectual understanding of the idea and implications of karma and karma yoga. And of course, without deep experience, this misunderstanding is bound to occur; understanding can only come with personal experience.

This particular controversy – work versus no work – has only arisen through misinterpretation of the teachings of the sages. Sages have said that action is the cause of bondage, but they have also said, almost in the same breath, that action is also the means to liberation. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the classical text on karma yoga, both statements are made: "... do not be attached to inaction."

"Perform action, O Arjuna . . ." (2:47, 48)

Conversely: "I do nothing at all; thus would the harmonized knower of truth think – seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, going, sleeping, breathing." (5:8)

Another two chapters of the *Bhagavad Gita* are devoted exclusively to these two seemingly conflicting ideas. Chapter 3 is called the 'Yoga of Action' while Chapter 5 is called the 'Yoga of Renunciation of Action'. Understanding of this apparent riddle really comes through experience and not logical reasoning. The *Bhagavad Gita* brings activity and non-activity together when it says: "He who sees inaction

in action and action in inaction is a wise man: he is a yogi and performer of all actions.”

We must all act or do some form of work. We have no choice. We cannot remain completely inactive. This is tersely explained in the *Bhagavad Gita*: “None can ever remain, even for a moment, without performing action; for everyone is compelled to act helplessly by the very qualities of nature.” (3:5)

Even if you do no physical work your mind will continue to work. Even refusing to work is action, but here the action occurs through physical restraint; the mind still works. While lying in bed, perhaps with an illness, you are still active, for your mind is still thinking. There is no such thing as total inactivity in normal states of awareness. Even while sleeping, one is acting – through dreams. Each person must always be doing something, whether physical, mental or both. The subconscious realms of the mind are a continuous hive of activity. You think you are doing nothing, perhaps in a state of drowsiness, but these deeper realms of the mind will continue to operate. You must accept that activity is a part of material life, and having accepted this, you should perform your duties to the best of your ability. Better still, you should try to practise karma yoga. In this way, you will at least use the compulsion to act as a means to higher awareness and knowledge.

Don't renounce work or everyday life. It is not necessary. Try to practise selfless work. This does not only mean welfare or social work, it means doing your work, whether digging a road or administering a multimillion dollar building project, with intensity, detachment and awareness. This is not easy at first, but it becomes easier. You can only do your best. But it is well worth putting into practice, for it will bring many benefits that you don't expect.

If you renounce, it should be renunciation of attachment to the fruits of your endeavours. Try not to think continually of what you will get as reward at the end of your work – your pay, praise, respect, etc. This obsessive dwelling on the fruits of actions intensifies the identification with the individual ego. Don't renounce work, but do it consciously and with as little 'I'ness as possible. Don't worry if you make no headway, because this will only lead to more mental tension.

Dharma

The word *dharma* can be interpreted to mean many things. In this chapter, dharma means those actions which are in accordance with one's mental and physical makeup. It implies those actions which come naturally to an individual and which lead to harmony within the whole framework of the world. It can be roughly, though very inadequately, translated as 'duty'. Dharma is not a subject that can be discussed in depth in a general sense, for the dharma for each individual is different. All we can do here is to give you a very basic guideline to help you recognize and tune in to your own dharma.

Find and accept your dharma and do it. When you are working think of nothing else but the work and if possible not the fruits. Merely do the work in hand to the best of your ability. Do it as worship if you are devotionally inclined. It is by doing one's dharma that one begins to harmonize both with the environment and the inner self. And it is by doing one's dharma in conjunction with karma yoga that one can experience higher states of awareness.

Remember that in fact all work is the same; there is really no such thing as higher or lower work. Whether one uses the body or the mind, it is still merely work; none is really any better or worse than the other. It is society that has said that certain types of work are either good or bad, of high status or low status. Work is work. What is the difference whether one builds a house, cleans a toilet, or rules a country? Work is the tool of karma yoga, the aim is to become the perfect instrument. This is the way to perfection and higher awareness.

The *Bhagavad Gita* lays down very sensible rules regarding one's dharma. It says: “A man always acts in accordance with his individual nature, even the realized man. All creatures follow their nature; what therefore can one accomplish by suppression of one's natural impulses or actions?” (3:33)

Elsewhere it is written: “The perfect individual, like everyone else, acts according to his specific physiological constitution, for he knows that all actions are performed by nature. His true nature, the Self, is not the doer.” (18:29)

“Taking delight in his own individual actions (dharma) a man can attain perfection.” (18:45)

So if your aim is to make money, then continue making money. If you repress externally, then your mind will only do it internally. If you have ambition then fulfil that ambition, but with as much awareness and detachment as possible. Peace of mind or higher awareness cannot be obtained by avoiding the things that your individual nature demands you to do. You will only suppress the desire and cause more tension and unhappiness. Dive into the turmoil of worldly activity; live out your *samskaras* (mental impressions) but with full awareness. This is essential in order to eventually jump out of the everlasting circle of aimless, egotistical activities.

There are many misconceptions about sin. The Indian scriptures in their characteristic, pragmatic, straight-to-the-point manner, have given an excellent definition of sin or sinful action. It is that which detracts or leads one away from the path to harmony, knowledge and higher awareness. If a person performs his dharma and practises karma yoga, then any action is automatically without sin. There is no absolute or fixed definition, for an action done by one person can lead another away from harmony.

"He who still retains his ego is mentally active even when at rest; but the wise man who is free from egoism is incapable of sin or wrong action." (18:29) Furthermore, it is performance of one's dharma that encourages egoless and sinless actions. This is explained very clearly in the *Bhagavad Gita* as follows: "It is better to do one's dharma without merit, than the dharma of another well performed. He who does the dharma determined by his individual nature incurs no sin." (18:47)

Practise your dharma to the best of your ability. Try not to do the dharma of another person, even though you could do it better, or more easily. You may think that you are helping someone by doing his work, but it may lead to less obvious adverse repercussions, perhaps by making the other person lazy or lose self-respect. So one should adhere to their own dharma (*swadharma*). At the same time try to practise karma yoga. In this way, one will reduce 'sinful' acts and thereby move into the realms of higher experience and knowledge. Incidentally, it is so important not to become caught up in the intellectual definitions of sin that have plagued people with untold phobias

and neuroses throughout history. Sin is merely that which leads one away from the path to enlightenment, nothing more.

It is important to accept one's limitations and do the actions that seem most harmonious, even if contrary to the expectations of others. Too often our actions are decided by other people. We see others doing certain actions, and feel that we must also do the same, even though it may be contrary to our individual personality. We feel obliged to live up to other people's expectations and try to become something that we are not capable of. Unhappiness is the consequence. Choose what you want and do it, but it should be positive, harmonious and what you feel is your dharma. The more you are able to become totally involved in your mode of activity, the better. The work acts as a vehicle. It leads to one-pointedness of mind. Automatically, problems start to fade away. If you are half-hearted in your actions, then the mind loses its power – there is no concentration and it tends to dither here and there. So do your work, your dharma, with intensity and with awareness.

Choose that which seems right for you, which interests you. It can even be a hobby – why not? Don't worry what other people think.

It is better to do positive work than work with negative repercussions. Positive work will not only benefit other people, but will lead you to a more relaxed mind and disposition. Positive or good actions are more conducive to progress in yoga. In a sense, so-called bad thoughts and acts (i.e. egotistical and non-dharmic) mould your character into a certain pattern. This leads to a destiny which is away from the path to higher awareness. On the other hand, thoughts and actions that are good (i.e. selfless and dharmic) lead to a destiny which permits the influx of higher awareness.

Eventually, of course, the aim is to jump beyond the fetters of both good and bad, for these are really relative terms. But this transcendence only occurs in states of higher awareness, and its meaning is beyond the realm of intellectual discussion. Until these stages of illumination, however, one must try to substitute so-called negative, adharmic actions by positive, dharmic actions. Disharmonious thoughts and actions have to be replaced by harmonious thoughts and actions. In a sense, one uses a thorn (good actions) to remove

another thorn (bad actions). Afterwards, both thorns are thrown away. People often say that it is one's duty to help others. This is a very noble sentiment, but actually for most people this is pervaded with a strong odour of hypocrisy. Most people help others merely to help themselves; to gain praise, social status and many other rewards. However, this becomes less and less with increased awareness. The more aware an individual becomes, the less selfish he will become. One actually starts to help other people for their sake, and less for one's own sake. But in the initial stages of karma yoga it is important to realize that any work undertaken, even that done under the guise of philanthropy, is more than likely motivated by an egotistical reason. Accept this and don't try to project the altruistic image. If you practise your dharma you will help yourself, by gradually purifying the mind, increasing concentration and becoming more contented. As a by-product you will also be helping other people, either directly or indirectly. Don't expect praise for your work; it is not deserved, for you are doing the work to help yourself; your efforts to do karma yoga will lead you to higher levels of awareness, not your fellow humans, at least not directly. Why expect praise? It is your privilege to work. It is your privilege to do karma yoga for your own happiness and spiritual evolverment. Don't expect anything in return.

Try not to take yourself or your work so seriously. The world will continue without you. Don't become fanatical but work as well as you can under the given circumstances, with as much detachment and awareness as possible. There is a law of karma. The Hindu, Buddhist, tantric, yogic and other scriptures of India have written reams and reams of information on this subject. In the *Bible* of Christianity, it is beautifully summed up as follows: "... whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

Newton also defined the idea of karma for science: to every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This applies to every action in life. As you do and think, so you become; at least on a mind-body level. If you think and act selfishly, then you will tend to become more selfish in the course of time. If a person is greedy, then after a while greed will become the predominant aspect of his personality. His ego drives will be intensified

in order to satisfy his greed. In this manner, the thoughts and aspirations of the mind flow most easily in that direction in which it has been habituated. The mountain streams of the monsoon rainfall will follow the riverbeds that have been carved out by previous downpours. All these mental desires prevent the influx of meditation, for they tend to increase the power of the individual ego. The aim of karma yoga is to follow one's dharma, which tends to diminish ego identification. The aim of karma yoga is to follow the dictates of the individual constitution, those actions which come naturally without effort. This type of karma is dharma and leads to lessening of the bondage of the ego. If you do your dharma, with awareness, then you will automatically start to harmonize with your environment. There will be less mental tension and conflict.

An action is only correct if it is the right action for you under the given circumstances. The same action may be wrong for another person under the same or different circumstances. Know that your actions can lead you to higher experiences and enlightenment, if they are done as karma yoga.

Different types of actions

Actions can be broadly classified into three specific modes. These modes are directly related to the three gunas (roughly translated as the three aspects of the phenomenal world) called *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. This is a fascinating subject.

The *Bhagavad Gita* clearly points out the different approaches to work according to individual temperaments. It defines the lowest form of action, *tamasic*, as follows: "Action done in delusion and without due consideration of its consequences and the effort and materials required, and which may easily bring harm to others, is *tamasic*." (18:25)

This type of action stems from general ignorance. In tantra, the individual who performs these types of action is classified as *pashu bhava* (instinctive man).

The next form of action, at a higher level, is called *rajasic*: "Action which is done for the fulfilment of personal desires, for the fruits of the action; which is done with much ego and much effort, is *rajasic*." (18:24) This is the most common type of action in the world today. In tantra, an individual of this temperament is

known as *veera bhava* (heroic, passionate and active man).

The highest form of action is called *sattwic* and is motivated by understanding. "Duty or actions done without passion, love or hatred, without consideration of the fruits, is *sattwic*." (18:23) This last form of action falls within the realm of *karma yoga* and leads to higher awareness. He is known as *divya bhava* (divinely inspired man) in *tantra*.

The aim of *yoga* is to gradually lead the individual from the *tamasic* states to the *rajasic* states, from doing *tamasic* actions to doing *rajasic* actions, and then progressively towards a predominantly *sattwic* state. Of course, there will be fluctuations between these different states: one will sometimes feel *tamasic* (lazy and dull), at other times *rajasic* (actively inclined) and so on. But through *yoga* it is possible to become predominantly *sattwic* in temperament. This is the launching pad to higher states of consciousness. The culmination of *yoga* is to lead one to the experience of that which is beyond the *gunas*; a state which is beyond the classification of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. This is called *gunatita* in Sanskrit, which means that which is beyond the mind, the sense and the play of nature.

At this stage it is worthwhile pointing out that *karma yoga* does not result in lethargy and lack of interest in work. It is widely believed that only passion, financial benefits and other motives can impel people to work, and that without these inducements there will be a tendency to languish in a state of total laziness and inactivity. Of course, anticipation of reward does make people work – there is little doubt about this. Yet at the same time, this kind of work leads to incessant discord both in the outside world and in the inner environment of the individual. On the other hand, a person who is not motivated by thoughts of personal reward and who has clear insight (*sattwic* temperament) will realize his duty and do it. He will follow the actions that come naturally to his body-mind complex. He will not stop his work, for there is no need. At the same time, he will do his work far more efficiently than if he was motivated for selfish reasons. He will be able to work with the least fuss and with minimum clash of interests in association with other people. The *sattwic* type of person can nimbly dodge around obstacles

which tend to block or confuse other people, perhaps because of pride or stubbornness. A *sattwic* man will think his way around problems as they arise. This is the boon of egolessness.

Karma yoga and other paths of yoga

Karma yoga should not be divorced from other forms of *yoga*. Other forms of *yoga* should be supplemented by *karma yoga*, and also *karma yoga* should not be practised in isolation; it too should be supplemented by other types of *yoga*. All the different *yogic* paths mutually reinforce each other. For example, *karma yoga* done with even moderate success will help one to gain more success in meditation practices. Improved concentration through *karma yoga* will help lead one to real meditation experience. In turn meaningful and more profound meditation experiences from *raja yoga*, *kriya yoga*, etc. will help one to more successfully practise *karma yoga*. It is a cyclic process, each helping the other. While meditation techniques help to highlight inner problems, both mental and emotional, *karma yoga* also helps to bring these problems out into the open and finally exhaust them.

Asanas and *pranayama* not only help improve meditation techniques, they also help one to perform *karma yoga* more efficiently. And in turn if you achieve even a reasonable flow of concentration during your working day then your daily practice of *asanas* and *pranayama* and meditation techniques will also undergo a vast improvement. You will automatically have a spontaneous flow of concentration throughout the practice, allowing the benefits to really manifest. This in itself is an important reason for trying to practise *karma yoga*. The heightened experiences and peace that one will come to know through the daily *yogic* practices will in turn make it far easier to practise *karma yoga*, which leads to greater relaxation and concentration in daily activities which again will make the daily *yogic* practice program more fruitful. It is a continuous elevating process. This applies to all *raja yoga* systems including *kriya yoga*.

If you are devotionally inclined then *karma yoga* can be directly linked with *bhakti yoga*¹. *Karma yoga* will also prepare the mind for *jnana yoga*², which requires an intense, concentrated mind. *Karma yoga* is a path for everyone. It supplements all other *yogic* paths.

Progress in karma yoga

Though one must apply effort in the early stages of karma yoga, eventually it arises spontaneously. There is an excellent Sanskrit and Hindi word called *bhava*. It means feeling, an attitude that springs up from the very depths of one's being. It is not a hypocritical or false feeling. It is a feeling that arises from the essence of one's nature – an expression of higher knowledge. It is neither pious nor artificial. Because of higher awareness and realization of the deeper relationships with other people, one actually wants to give as much as one can to others. There is no choice; no effort is required. In the beginning karma yoga requires effort and cultivation, but the advent of higher understanding transforms karma yoga into a spontaneous expression of *bhava*. There is no longer any practice as such, for one begins to radiate real karma yoga.

Another strange thing happens: though one desires less and less fruits, one receives more and more fruits, beyond one's wildest dreams. To those who expect, little or nothing comes. Actually a person who thinks he is doing karma yoga is not, because there is concern for the little self. A person who is really practising karma yoga is so absorbed in doing his work (while simultaneously being a witness), that he in a self-conscious sense does not exist. A person practising karma yoga is not really doing anything. The actions happen through him. If one thinks that he is doing karma yoga then he is automatically operating from an ego level of individual existence and distinction. And this is not karma yoga in the highest sense. A person practising karma yoga really no longer exists as an individual. His mind and body work. He does not. He is inactive amongst continuous activity. We have already discussed this apparent enigma under the heading entitled 'Action and Inaction'. It is action in inaction and inaction in action, and its meaning only becomes understandable through personal experience.

We have briefly discussed the higher stages of karma yoga; in fact, karma yoga in its truest sense. Don't be too concerned with what we have said, for you will never unravel the mystery by logical speculation. Instead you should start to practise karma yoga to the best of your ability, so that you will really know its meaning for yourself.

Karma yoga according to the Bhagavad Gita

Though we have already given a number of quotations from the *Bhagavad Gita*, we feel it is worthwhile giving a few more selected verses. This may seem a little repetitive, but it will help you to further grasp the essence of karma yoga practice.

Attachment to the fruits of actions: "Your right is to work only, never to its fruits. Do not be motivated by the fruits of actions and do not be attached to doing nothing." (2:47)

Equanimity: "Do your action, oh Arjuna, with the feeling and attitude of yoga. Abandon attachment and be balanced in success and failure. Equanimity of mind is yoga." (2:48)

Necessity of action: "Surely, it is not possible for an embodied being to entirely abandon actions; but he who relinquishes the rewards of actions is a man of renunciation." (18:11)

Egolessness: "He who is free of the feeling of the ego, who is not swayed by the feelings of good and bad – though he slays these people, he does not really kill and he is not bound by the actions." (18:17)

Renunciation and enlightenment: "He who is totally unattached to anything, who is in control of his individual self, who is devoid of desire – he by renunciation (mentally) attains the supreme state of freedom from action (enlightenment)." (18:49)

"Therefore, without attachment, always perform the actions that need to be done; it is by working without attachment that one can know higher awareness." (3:19)

Duty: "Do your duty, for action is far superior to inaction and even the mere maintenance of the physical body would be impossible without some form of action." (3:8)

There are seven hundred verses in the *Bhagavad Gita*, each of which is pregnant with meaning. We strongly urge the reader to obtain a translation of this scripture, explore the mine of knowledge for himself and take out the gold of wisdom.

The razor's edge according to the Ishavasya Upanishad

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* consists of only eighteen verses, yet contains sublime and practical teachings. It clearly points out the importance – in fact the necessity – of performing one's duties. It emphasizes that one must live in the external as well as the internal

world. One without the other leads to delusion and away from the path to higher knowledge. Many people who have spiritual aspiration are faced with a dilemma: whether to live in the world of action, or to only practise meditation techniques. The *Ishavasya Upanishad* gives a clear answer. It says that one must do both simultaneously. One must be both extroverted and introverted. One must supplement and express one's inner experience with outer actions. This is stated in no uncertain terms as follows: "Those who follow the path of action alone will surely enter the blinding darkness of ignorance. Furthermore, those who retreat from the world in order to seek knowledge through constant practice of meditative techniques, similarly remain in the quagmire of ignorance." (verse 9). This is like the razor's edge: there must be a balance between excessive worldly interest and activity, and overintrospection.

One must try to integrate the paths of extroversion and introversion. If you consider great yogis, saints and sages through history, you will realize that they all expressed themselves in the outside world. Even though they experienced and probably lived permanently in the infinity of enlightenment, they still continued to express themselves in the outer world. This applies to Buddha, Christ and many other people.

It applies to Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda and so on. They taught their disciples, they travelled giving sermons and tried to help people who sought their guidance. Each of these illumined people continued to act and express themselves in the outside world according to the natural dictates of his mind-body (dharma). Some became hermits; others worked ceaselessly for the general welfare of fellow humans, such as Swami Sivananda and Mahatma Gandhi. None of them became a human vegetable. This does not only apply to those who live in and know the highest states of illumination – it also applies to you. You too must strike a balance between external action and introspection.

The *Ishavasya Upanishad* further emphasizes this important point by saying: "That which is known through doing only external actions, is different to that which is known through introversion. Thus it has been said by the wise." (verse 10)

Total concern with the outside world leads to intellectual knowledge. Only understanding of the internal sphere of existence will bring about deeper understanding of the material world around.

On the other hand, rejection of the worldly life and complete concern for meditation practices and the mind is also a block. How is this? The reason is simple: without resolving and harmonizing one's outer life, one can never really know deeper states of knowledge. Higher states of awareness only occur when there is perfect balance both in the inner and outer worlds. Those people who tend to reject their activities in the world still tend to have many unresolved problems. Rejection of the world does not remove the problems, they merely lie dormant in the mind. These act as obstacles to success in meditation practices. Failure to clear up the outer conflicts and concerns automatically prevents one gaining the highest benefits from introspection. Therefore, there must be a dual process of external activities combined with periods of trying to explore the mind. This applies mainly to the early stages of spiritual life, for eventually there ceases to be any difference between the inner and outer world.

This is what Ramana Maharshi meant when he said: "Setting apart time for meditation practices is only for beginners. A man who is advanced (in the spiritual path) will begin to enjoy deeper beatitude whether he is at work or not. While his hands are in society, he keeps his head cool in solitude."

This applies to a person who lives in higher states of awareness. Most people must combine their daily work, in the form of karma yoga, with daily sessions of meditation practices. There must be acceptance, integration and understanding of both the inner and outer environments. For this reason, it is essential that each person with spiritual aspiration should practise introverting techniques such as raja yoga, kriya yoga, pranayama, etc., combined with and supplemented by methods of harmonizing one's interaction with the external surroundings, such as karma yoga. It is only in this way that one can start to effectively harmonize with both the inner and the outer world. It is only in this way that one can really start to tread the path and know the complete oneness of everything that exists,

both internal and external. It is for this reason that karma yoga is so important, and why Swami Sivananda urged everyone to work and play in both the outer and inner world. This is the reason why everyone does some form of work in our ashram.

Karma yoga in other systems

No other system documented the essence of karma yoga as carefully as the Indian scriptures, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. This does not mean that other spiritual systems are ignorant of the implications and utility of karma yoga. Far from it. They just did not write about the subject in detail. Instead, the essence was conveyed by the spiritual master to his disciples on a personal basis. The teacher taught and demonstrated by personal example.

Let us look at Taoism. Intellectuals have wrongly interpreted Lao Tse, the sage who formulated Taoism (he did not invent Taoism, but merely put the ideas on paper). He expounded the idea that one should do only that which needs to be done. Many people thought that he was urging total complacency and laziness. Taoism was branded as the philosophy of idleness, but the critics have missed its essence. Lao Tse meant that people should act as though they are not acting. This is not laziness; it is letting the body-mind act in the way that comes naturally. It is allowing the body-mind to act in accordance with that which has to be done and simultaneously knowing that the true Self (Tao) does not really act. The Self is inactive and is the witness. This is karma yoga and is exactly the same as described in the *Bhagavad Gita*. This close correspondence should not surprise us, for basic truths are universal. They are not the monopoly of any one creed or nation.

The Tao says that one should flow with the current of life. Again this has been grossly misinterpreted. It means that one should try to act in the way that suits the situation as it really is. Don't act from the ego. If circumstances demand that you be industrious or protect your property, then by all means do so. Do that which is demanded by the circumstances, that which is best for the whole. Only then is it right action.

The Tao is very much concerned with the perfection of action. The fisherman, the carpenter, the builder and other craftsmen are

skilled for one reason: they use the available materials and themselves in the best possible manner. They harmonize themselves with the tools at their disposal. If the muscles are overused, if one is beset by worries and tensions, if one is too egotistical, then the work will not be the best that can be achieved. This is admirably summed up by the following verse from the *Tao Te Ching*:

The man with power does not reveal that he possesses power;

therefore he keeps his power.

The man of lesser power tries continually to demonstrate that he has power;

therefore, in fact, he is without power.

The man of real power, the expert, does not really act, whereas the man of lesser power acts.

This is pure karma yoga. As the *Bhagavad Gita* says: "Yoga is efficiency in action." Things happen in the way that they should for the given circumstances. A person on the path of karma yoga makes optimum use of the natural abilities and things available to bring about the best possible actions.

Zen Buddhism has produced some very profound poems on what we would call karma yoga. They are not specific but implied. Zen emphasizes the importance of living every moment to the full. This is karma yoga. A positive action is seen as that action which expresses the fullness of life at a particular time and in given circumstances that make the action possible. This is karma yoga. Every action should be lived and pursued with the greatest intensity. For most persons this is almost impossible, for they are beset and continually distracted by mental tensions, anticipation of results or fruits, personal enmities and prejudices, desire for domination and possession and so many other things. The action becomes the means and not the end in itself.

Zen is very pragmatic and non-escapist in its attitudes. Many people think that Zen and other spiritual systems go against the grain and the flow of life, that they somehow oppose daily life. This idea could not be further from the truth. Zen sees the path to higher awareness to be through the world; it is not to be experienced by escaping from the world. There is a Zen saying that goes something like:

“Not escape from life, but escape into life.” This is the essence of karma yoga. Life and its experiences, its ups and downs, are to be used to help one know higher knowledge. The Zen masters shun logic and reasoning in the same way that they would an angry cobra. They demonstrate through action and example. Every act, whether eating food, digging the garden or whatever is regarded as a religious act. They do not try to divorce spiritual aspiration from daily life. They are karma yogis in the fullest sense of the word. Why waste valuable time with useless philosophical ideas? Act, but act with intensity and awareness. Be totally involved in each and every act.

The Zen masters did not preach one thing and then do something else. They actually practised karma yoga (as we would call it). In fact, many Zen masters seem to have carried on the line of work for which they were trained, and why not? There are many stories of masters who were butchers or woodcutters and the work they did was their path of Zen. They saw absolutely no discrepancy between spiritual and daily life. This is perfectly summed up by the master Huang Po: “Don’t allow the events of daily life to bind you, but never stop doing them. Only by acting in this way can you become enlightened.”

In other forms of Buddhism karma yoga does not seem to have been specifically classified, but in Mahayana Buddhism it is strongly implied. It is said that the purpose of the journey to nirvana (enlightenment) is not taken for the individual but for the benefit of all. The necessity of unselfish motives is inherent in the system. This is karma yoga in essence.

In Christianity there is no systematized form of karma yoga, but again there are powerful hints, suggestions and allusions. In fact, in one short sentence the whole philosophy of karma yoga is summed up. In the Lord’s Prayer it says: “Thy will be done.”

An explanation is hardly required in view of what we have already said about karma yoga in this topic. It means that the individual on the spiritual path accepts what has to be done and does it, but of course it implies far more than this, for it says “Thy will” which implies that the action is in tune with the cosmic consciousness.

There is one more unforgettable statement which relates to karma yoga. It is as follows:

“The Father (consciousness) and I are one, but the Father is greater than I . . . the Father doeth the work.”

The implications and meaning of this phrase are wonderful to say the least. This is an utterance of a mystic in a higher state of meditation. It is similar to many phrases that are abundant in Indian scriptures. This should not be surprising for the experience of samadhi is not located in one place. It is the experience of mystics throughout the world.

We could so easily write a voluminous book on this one quotation, but we will not for we are presently only concerned with karma yoga. This statement indicates the highest stage of karma yoga, and in fact of yoga in general. It tries to describe the impossible: perfect harmony and union between the individual being and supreme consciousness. In this state of experience, the individual does not really do any work. The work happens through the instrumentality of his body and mind. The work is really done by consciousness. This is beautifully described in a similar Indian maxim, which irrefutably utters: “*Naham karta – Harih karta*,” – “I don’t do – consciousness does.”

So, to summarize, we find that the idea of karma yoga is not confined to the Indian scriptures and yoga. It is common to other systems, including ones that we have not had time and space to mention. However, it is only in the Indian scriptures and in yoga that we find a systematic formulation of its laws and aims. This, of course, has its disadvantages in that it is easily open to gross misinterpretation by intellectual analysts, and this has happened with sad results. The other systems have left the transmission of karma yoga to personal instructions handed from teacher to disciple. This of course has meant that its relevance and application were confined to the few, but at least there was less misunderstanding.

Mahatma Gandhi – karma yogi

All great yogis, saints and sages are karma yogis, for they perform perfect actions, without the slightest hint of egoism. It is not necessary to do large amounts of work to practise karma yoga. It is the attitude and state of awareness that is important. Even a hermit in his cave can be a karma yogi, even though he does little work. Yet at the same time, there are or

have been certain people who are renowned as karma yogis, for they most clearly and obviously illustrate and epitomize the ideals of karma yoga. They do prodigious amounts of work without desire of fame, without thought of power or money. They work for the sake of the work and often to help other people to raise themselves above the mire of social conditions or spiritual poverty. Probably the most well known example in this century is Mahatma Gandhi. He performed incredible amounts of work, for he was very little influenced by personal likes and dislikes, whims and fancies. His mind was free of the limitations that normally interfere with the actions of most people. Because of this, he was able to view the problems of India and the work that was his duty with pristine clarity.

Most decisions in the world are clouded over by personal friendships and enmities. Gandhi was able to overcome this one-sidedness, and it is through this that he obtained his strength. He had no real personal friends in the usual sense of the word, for all people were his friends, even his so-called enemies. None of his actions were done as a favour. He acted because something needed to be done; the situation demanded it to be so. He acted for the benefit of people in general and that which was for the overall good of the people of India. Some people say that he was stubborn, but he acted because he knew his own mind, could understand the mind of other people and the world situation in a clear undistorted light. He was a politician with a strong mind, yet he showed deep and sincere compassion for all. By vocation he was a politician; by aspiration he was a great karma yogi.

Mahatma Gandhi achieved his success by purifying his mind by continuous effort and karma yoga. Because of this, he achieved tremendous amounts of work, both efficiently and without leaving things half done. He never seemed to tire of his work, unlike most other people who do an hour's work and then lose interest or become fatigued. Why was this? The answer of course lies with the mind. Gandhi, through relentless practise of karma yoga, backed up by other forms of yoga including bhakti and kriya yoga, was able to clean his mind. A mind that is calm can do the most intense work for long periods of time without fatigue. It does not become diverted

by external distractions or inner disturbances. It remains focussed on the work in hand. Most people waste their energy on useless, petty, egotistical arguments or heated discussions about nothing. Their mental energy and in turn their physical energy is dissipated in all directions. Little or no power goes towards the work that is to be done.

The combination of concentrated power and detachment becomes almost irresistible. It moves mountains, as the saying goes. Gandhi clearly illustrated this, and we emphasize again that detachment does not mean disdain for the things of the world. Gandhi, though he was surely detached, nevertheless felt and expressed overwhelming compassion. Detachment is the attitude of mind where no matter what happens, there is no negative repercussion and resulting mental disturbance in the mind. One does the best that one can do with one's ability, but at the same time one doesn't allow external events to unbalance or throw the mind. The attitude can be slowly developed and applied as it was so successfully by Mahatma Gandhi.

Gandhi saw that every action he did (or did not do, depending on the point of view) was part of the divine process of the universe in accordance with the will of the cosmic consciousness. He was only an instrument, a mere witness of his actions.

There are many other people who epitomize the essence of karma yoga. People like Swami Vivekananda and Swami Sivananda show that karma yoga is not just an idealistic thought, but that it is possible. Both of these people, as well as uncountable others, both famous and unknown, have expressed total egolessness in their interaction with the world – perfect expression, perfect response to given circumstances. And what these people can do, you also can achieve. The path and the possibility are open to everyone. Each person can develop a powerful and one-pointed mind and awaken their intuitive faculties. Each person can become a karma yogi. All that is required is the need to attain perfection, together with relentless and continuous practice.

Summary of karma yoga

The aim of karma yoga is to become the perfect reflector of the cosmic consciousness in the arena of the manifested world. Usually this

perfection is impossible to attain because of personal whims. These have to be eradicated. When one no longer considers himself to be the doer, but merely the instrument, then everything that one does becomes spiritualized and perfect. The actions and work become super-efficient. He becomes the expert of experts in his actions, the least effort produces the greatest results. The individual has equanimity of mind under all situations, for how can an instrument become angry, upset or egotistical? It is the ego and personal desires that make us react adversely with others and the environment.

Karma yoga develops the faculty of concentration, which is essential in all fields, and spheres of life. It also vastly improves the benefits that one gains from meditation practices and will also improve the benefits that one will gain from kriya yoga in the future.

Higher stages of karma yoga become meditation. While performing actions, the karma yogi reposes in the state of meditation, even amongst the most intense activity. The karma yogi rests, floats, dissolves in the divine bliss of higher awareness. The object acted upon, the actions themselves and the karma yogi become one and the same. This is real meditation and real karma yoga.

Awareness in karma yoga is essential. It is important to develop the ability to do the work in hand, while simultaneously being a witness to the actions. Aim to become a detached, disinterested observer. Though it seems to be a paradox, one is able to work more efficiently in this manner without being swayed by personal whims and prejudices, nor motivated by ego likes or dislikes. One does that which is necessary for the given circumstances, as they really are, without favour. One acts from the very core of being – the Self.

Heidegger, the western philosopher, has written: "The artist must turn himself to that which wants to be revealed and permit the process to happen through him."

You too must become an artist in everything that you do. Develop the perception and intuition of the artist, whether you are working in the garden, eating food, singing, typing, writing or whatever you do. Do everything as though you are an artist painting a masterpiece. Do your work, no matter how seemingly trivial, as though you are creating a work of art. Treat

the world stage as your studio. Try to achieve perfection in everything that you do. This is karma yoga. Allow action to happen through the body and the mind, without any effort. Ideally, they should only happen. You must try to become the perfect vessel for the expression of consciousness in the world arena.

Perfect karma yoga cannot occur until the ceaseless chattering and turmoil of the mind settles. The mind must become as clear as a crystal, as calm as a still pond. The mind must be emptied of conflict, then every action and thought will happen. Thoughts will arise like a gigantic eruption in the endless ocean of the mind. They will have great power, yet will quietly fade away as quickly as they arose. The thoughts will settle down into the tranquil depths again without leaving the slightest trace. This is karma yoga.

Karma yoga is impossible to really understand without experience. But even one minute's, even one second's experience of real karma yoga, of the bliss, the perfection will give you full understanding of what we have been inadequately trying to explain. No more questions or contradictions will occur, because you will know. Until this profound experience, one must merely read carefully what we have written, think about it and try to put it into practice, no matter how superficially or inadequately. The precepts of karma yoga seem almost trite, but their implications are overwhelming, and if practised will launch you into the realms of higher awareness.

In conclusion

For most people there has to be a balance: a balance between introspection and external expression in the form of work. The more intense and compelling the work the better, for it will jolt you, force you out of the rut of living in the past. You will be forced to live in the present or anticipate the future. In this way you will be prevented from brooding over your problems. You will become alive. You will be elevated out of the morass of laziness. At the same time, you should do a certain amount of introspection, for this will allow you to confront the contents of your mind, including phobias, conflicts, etc. Work combined with a certain amount of introspection in the form of meditative practices is the way to remove mental problems and gain peace. Instead

of brooding over your complexes etc., you will recognize the root and in time they will disappear through expression or outlet in work and through awareness. This is the start on the path of higher awareness. If the work is slowly transformed into karma yoga, then your spiritual progress will be rapid. You will literally 'fly' into the realms of higher awareness and knowledge.

Therefore, passion and activity are really a means to higher awareness. They are not negative aspects of life to be suppressed. They should be used, especially in the earlier stages of development. Your natural drives can help you. Use them, and in the course of time, try to transform your activities into karma yoga.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1

² Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

Most people find forward bending asanas reasonably difficult. This is because their backs have lost their flexibility through lack of exercise. This flexibility is most important, for it keeps the spinal column and associated nerves in the best possible condition. In fact, a flexible spine is often a clear indicator of good health, while a rigid spine often signifies poor health. This is illustrated in the case of children, who generally radiate abundant energy and good health, and who find forward bending asanas very simple. Of course, there are many other reasons for their wonderful health, but a supple spine is a contributing factor.

If a person takes sufficient exercise, then the spine will automatically remain flexible. The problem of stiffness and rigidity of the spine only arises with sedentary life, where people don't use their bodies enough. Probably any person who belongs to one of the more primitive tribes in the world would be able to do forward bending asanas without the slightest hesitation or difficulty. People who live close to nature keep their bodies flexible and healthy because of their active way of life. Modern man must find other methods of maintaining health and exercising his body. One method is to do asanas, including forward bending poses, on a regular basis.

The forward bending asana we will describe here is called *paschimottanasana*. It is one of the best of all asanas.

PASCHIMOTTANASANA (BACK STRETCHING POSE)

This asana has many other names. The most common are *ugrasana* (fierce or powerful pose) and *paschimatanasana*, which has the same meaning as *paschimottanasana*.

Terminology

There are many meanings associated with the name of this asana. Literally, the word *paschima*

means 'the back', or 'posterior'; it also means 'the west'. The word *utthan* means 'to stretch'. Therefore, the usual English name of this asana is 'the back stretching pose'.

The word *utthan* is also akin to the word 'tan', which makes up part of the word *tantra* (the mother system of yoga). In this context, it is not physical stretching that is implied, but stretching or expansion of awareness. The word *paschima* still means the back, but has greater significance if it is taken to mean the *sushumna nadi*. This *nadi* is the most important psychic pathway in the body. During higher states of awareness, *prana* ascends this *nadi* from the bottom of the back (perineum) to the head (*sahasrara*). In fact, it is said that the experience of higher awareness cannot take place unless *prana* flows within this *nadi*. So this asana has a very elevated meaning. It means the asana which expands awareness by unleashing pranic currents which flow upwards within the *sushumna nadi*. This is a fitting name, for this is indeed a powerful asana.

Scriptural references

This asana is widely mentioned in many ancient texts. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: "Knees straight and forehead on the knees, hands on toes in a sitting position. It directs vital energy into the back especially in the *sushumna*; the digestive power is increased, the obesity reduced. Man becomes free of diseases and maintains the body in a healthy condition."

It is similarly described in such books as the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Shiva Samhita*. In fact, the *Shiva Samhita* is more specific in praising this asana. It says: "A person who perfects this asana and does it daily induces *vayu* (vital or pranic energy) to flow through the back in the *sushumna*."

Technique

There are various methods of performing *paschimottanasana*. Each method has its

advantages, but the basic technique we will give has been chosen because we feel it allows maximum relaxation of the back; this in turn leads to the best possible stretch of the back in the final position. Some alternative methods are given at the end of this topic.



Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out in front of the body.

Place your hands on the knees, palms facing downwards.

Relax the whole body, especially the back muscles.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2: forward movement

Breathe in deeply.

Then, while exhaling, slowly bend your head and trunk forwards.

As you move forwards, slide your hands along the legs towards the feet.

Don't bend your legs.

Bend forwards as far as the flexibility of your back will allow.

Don't strain under any circumstances.

The aim is to hold your big toes with the fingers and to touch your forehead to the knees; however many people, especially beginners, will find this impossible at present.

Merely bend forwards as far as you are able. If possible, grasp your big toes with your hands. If you cannot manage this, hold your feet at the heels.

Otherwise grasp your ankles.

If this is impossible, hold your calves.

Stay in this position.

Consciously relax your back muscles again.

Stage 3: accentuation of forward stretch for beginners

Those people who can easily grasp their feet or toes and who touch, or nearly touch, their forehead to their knees should proceed directly to stage 4.

Breathe in deeply.

As you breathe out, try to gently pull your back

a little further forwards; you should only use your arms to do this, allowing the back muscles to remain passive.

Don't use excessive force or try to bend too far forwards; even a few centimetres forward movement of your head is more than adequate. Make sure you firmly maintain your grip on the legs, feet or toes.

Keep your legs perfectly straight – this is important.

Hold this slightly accentuated forward bend. Breathe in.

Breathe out and again try to gently but firmly pull your back and head a little further forwards in the direction of your knees and feet. Don't strain.

Breathe in while holding this position.

Repeat the same procedure once more.

Then beginners should breathe in while slowly raising their back to the starting position.

After a short rest repeat the whole procedure again.

Stage 4: final pose

This stage is to be done by those people who have a supple back; that is, people who can place, or nearly place, their head on the knees. The aim is to gradually elongate the back muscles and stretch the whole spine by gently pulling the head further towards the feet.

Gaze at your feet.

Make sure that you have a firm grip of the toes or feet.

Relax your whole back.

Exhale and gently pull your chin towards the feet.

Keep your legs straight.

Remember, the stretch of the back should be applied by the arms, while the back remains passive.

If you are holding your big toes, then bend your arms downwards and try to touch the floor with the elbows.

If you are holding your heels, then bend your arms sideways.

Don't try to pull your head too far forwards.

At the end of exhalation hold the new position. Slowly breathe in.

Then while exhaling, again gently pull your head a little nearer to the feet.

Hold the position and breathe in again.

Repeat this procedure three or four times, until your head will no longer move forwards.

Then relax your arms and the rest of your body, but maintain the grip of your hands on the feet or toes.

Rest your forehead or face on your legs.

In this position, the abdomen and chest should press against the thighs and the legs should be straight.

Close your eyes. This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time. Then breathe in while slowly returning to the starting position.

Breathing

To summarize: Inhale deeply in the starting position (stage 1).

Exhale as you bend forwards (stage 2).

Inhale as you hold your position (stage 3 or 4).

Exhale as you pull yourself further forwards (stage 3 or 4).

Continue inhalation and exhalation in stage 3 or 4 as you accentuate the flexion of the spine.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

Inhale as you return to the starting position.

Points to remember when doing the asana

Paschimottanasana is an excellent asana that gives many benefits, if it is done correctly. Read the following instructions and carry them out when performing the asana:

1. Make sure that there is perfect coordination between the breathing and physical movement. This is necessary to bring about the best possible flexion of the spine.
2. Keep your legs straight throughout the entire practice. This applies particularly to beginners, who will be tempted to bend their legs in order to obtain a greater forward bend. If you bend your legs the asana becomes very easy and even those people with the stiffest body will be able to touch their heads to their knees. This may give you a glimmer of satisfaction, but you will obtain little or no benefit. One of the main purposes of the asana is to stretch the muscles of the spinal region and the back of the legs (hamstring muscles). So keep your legs straight and flat on the floor, even though you may feel disillusioned at your inability to bend more than slightly forwards.
3. Don't use excessive force or violent jerks in order to do the asana. This is important,

for it is so easy to strain the back and hamstring muscles. The muscles should be progressively stretched over a period of days and months. Don't use undue force in order to perfect and master the asana during your first or second attempt. If you are unable to touch your knees, or even hold your feet, don't worry or despair, all that is required is time and practice.

Relaxation

Relaxation of the back muscles is essential in order to gain proficiency in this asana. Even the slightest muscular contraction of the back will impede the forward bend to some degree. The more you relax the more you will be able to bend forwards. It is inability to systematically relax the spinal muscles that makes this asana reasonably difficult for beginners.

To gain the best possible flexion of the body, it is worthwhile spending a short period of time relaxing the back muscles before attempting the asana. A good method is to be aware of breathing and to simultaneously imagine that the spine is made of rubber. With practice you should find that you gain more control over your muscles and will be able to relax them at will.

Furthermore, it is important that the back remains relaxed when you bend forwards. To do this, you must allow the spinal muscles to be passive, letting the arm muscles supply all the effort that is required. The same applies to the hamstring muscles at the back of the legs; let them remain passive.

Anchoring points of the hands

The final position of the hands is important, for the hands provide the fixed point by which the back is pulled forwards by the arms. The following are the main positions:

1. The thumbs and index fingers of each hand hold the two big toes. This is the best position and should be performed by those who are able. By pulling the toes, one tends to simultaneously keep the legs straight by a levering action. The practitioner should experiment for himself. Therefore, using the toes as the anchoring point simultaneously gives the hamstring muscles the best possible stretch.
2. The fingers can be interlocked and the hands hooked around the bottom of the toes. This is as good as holding the big toes.

3. One can hold the heels. This method is not as good as methods 1 and 2, for it tends to bend the legs.
4. The hands can grasp the ankles or calves. This is for beginners and not very useful for keeping the legs straight and stretching the hamstring muscles. As soon as your back becomes more flexible you should try to hold your feet or toes.

Awareness

Awareness should be directed towards breathing, physical movement and relaxation of the body while moving into the final pose. In the final pose be aware of the breathing pattern.

Duration

Beginners should do at least three rounds (as described in stage 3) every day.

Those who can do stage 4 should remain in the final position for as long as they can do so comfortably. Three minutes is a reasonable time for general health benefits. If you want to induce profound states of relaxation, try to hold it for longer periods, up to say fifteen minutes, but this is only for those people who have been practising asanas for some time.

Sequence

Paschimottanasana should be followed by a backward bending asana such as bhujangasana¹ or shalabhasana². It can also be practised after backward bending asanas as a counterpose.

For general health benefits the asana can be done at any time during your asana program. However, we particularly recommend that this asana be done immediately before meditation practice. This especially applies if you only want to practise a meditation technique without other yogic practices, perhaps because of lack of spare time. Paschimottanasana is a wonderful preparatory technique, for it quickly loosens up the body, removing stiffness and induces high states of relaxation and wakefulness.

Limitations

People who suffer from slipped disc or sciatica are advised not to practise paschimottanasana. Allow at least three hours to elapse after food before doing this asana.

Benefits

The asana stretches and tones the spinal and hamstring muscles and the associated nerves. Because it improves the efficiency of the spinal nerves in particular, it has beneficial repercussions throughout the entire body. It loosens the hip joints. It helps to remove excess fat in the abdominal region. The asana tones all the abdominal organs, including the liver, pancreas, spleen, kidneys and adrenal glands. As such it helps to remove diabetes, flatulence, constipation, etc. It has been found useful for alleviating various types of sexual maladies, for the asana gives a direct massage of the pelvic region.

This is an asana that is traditionally well known for its utility in harmonizing nervous and pranic energies within the body. As such it is very useful for helping to bring about states of meditation.

Advanced practices from the final pose

The two following practices can be performed from the final pose. As such they should only be attempted by people who can easily assume and stay in the final pose. Both these methods accentuate the influence of the asana on the physical and pranic body and mind.

Method 1

Remain in the final pose for some time. Then slowly move your head towards the thighs, keeping your forehead in contact with the legs.

As you push the head backwards, try to arch the back upwards as much as possible.

Simultaneously move your hands backwards and hold the side of the knees, with the forearms beside the thighs.

Try to accentuate the curvature of the back by using the arms as levers.

Hold the final position for as long as you can.

The basic practice of paschimottanasana produces the maximum elongation of the spine and separates the individual vertebrae.

This alternative practice produces the best possible flexion of the spine.

Method 2

Stay in the final pose (stage 4) of the basic technique for some time.

Then breathe in and raise your head and shoulders.

Simultaneously, you have to curve the spine by pushing the abdomen downwards, so that it remains in contact with the top of the thighs. Try to raise your head and shoulders as high as possible, but while keeping your abdomen and navel as low as possible.

Stay in this raised pose for as long as you can while holding the breath.

Then exhale and return to the final pose of the basic technique.

Hold your breath for a short time and then repeat.

Do this 3 times.

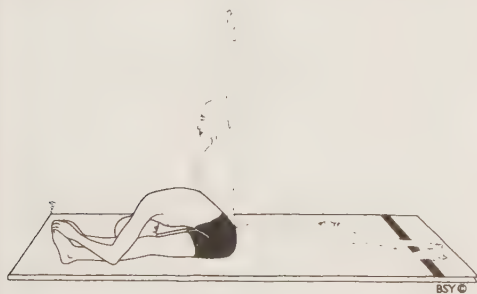
This additional practice accentuates the influence on the spine, as well as all the other benefits of paschimottanasana.

Variations

There are many variations of paschimottanasana. The following are a few of the most important ones.

GATYATMAK PASCHIMOTTANASANA (DYNAMIC BACK STRETCH POSE)

This asana loosens up the whole body, as well as giving many of the same benefits as the basic form.



Technique

Lie flat on your back.

Stretch your arms behind your head.

Relax the whole body.

Raise the trunk to the sitting position, keeping the arms above the head.

Bend forwards and do paschimottanasana.

Retain the final pose for a short time.

Then return to the sitting position.

Lean backwards and return to the starting position.

Repeat the whole process a number of times in quick succession.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe normally in the starting position. Inhale while taking the sitting position. Exhale while bending forwards into paschimottanasana. Hold the breath in the final pose and inhale while returning to the starting position.

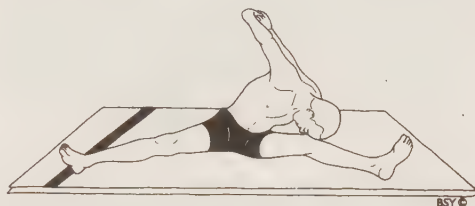
The awareness should be on the physical movement and breath.

Number of rounds

Do as many rounds as you can up to a maximum of ten.

PADA PRASAR PASCHIMOTTANASANA (LEGS SPREAD BACK STRETCH POSE)

This asana can be translated as 'the legs spread back stretch pose'.



Variation 1

Sit with your legs straight and spread apart.

Clasp your hands behind your back.

This is the starting position.

Twist your trunk slightly to the right.

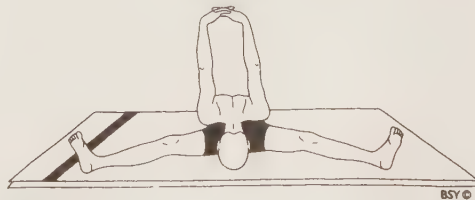
Keeping your arms straight, push them upwards behind your back.

Simultaneously, bend forwards and try to touch your head to your right knee.

This is the final position. Stay in the final position for as long as is comfortable.

Then return to the starting position.

Repeat the same movement on the left side.



Variation 2

Take the same starting position as variation 1, with the hands clasped behind the back.

While raising your arms behind your head, try

to touch the ground directly in front of your body with the forehead.

This is the final position.

Return to the starting position.

Variation 3

Take the same starting position as the other two variations, but do not clasp your hands behind your back.

Bend forwards and grasp your big toes with your hands.

Try to touch the floor directly in front of the body with your forehead. This is the final position.

Remain in the final position for some time, then return to the starting position.

Breathing for all three variations

Breathe in deeply in the starting position.

Breathe out as you bend forwards. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position. Inhale

as you return to the starting position. If you remain in the final position for a short period of time, retain your breath instead.

Further details

These three variations are more difficult than the basic form of paschimottanasana, and should not be attempted till you have mastered the basic form.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 3

Mudras: Hand Mudras

The following four mudras are traditional hand mudras. There are many other hand mudras, hundreds in fact, three of which we have already described: jnana, chin and chinmaya mudras¹. We don't intend to go into very much detail about these mudras for it is far better that you practise them yourself.

The mudras that we have given here are particularly useful, for they can be done in your daily meditation program with little extra effort and no extra expenditure of time. They are ideally suited for integration with meditative techniques, for they intensify the power and the benefits that you will obtain.

SHANKHA MUDRA



The word *shankha* means 'shell' or 'conch', the type that one can so easily find on a quiet beach. Therefore, the English translation of this mudra is 'conch mudra'.

The conch is an integral part of religion, for many of the deities, such as Vishnu, Lakshmi and Shiva are shown blowing or holding this symbolic object. Even in the opening chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* Sri Krishna and Arjuna blow their conches: "Then, Madhava (Krishna) and the son of Pandu (Arjuna) who were seated in their magnificent chariot, yoked with fine white horses, blew their divine conches." (1:14)

In ancient European tradition also, the conch is often used. For example, the tritons used the conch as a trumpet.

The most obvious thing that this conch, or rather its sound, represents, is the cosmic, inner

sound of each and every individual. This is the sound that links the individual with highest consciousness, like a puppet on a string. This is called *nada*, or *shabda*, in Sanskrit. It is logos in some of the Western traditions. When the conch is blown it makes a penetrating sound like a long *Aum*. This is the reason it is sounded during religious ceremonies.

While sitting for meditation practice the most comfortable method of holding this mudra is to position the hands as shown, then rest them on your lap.

BHAIRAVA MUDRA



Bhairava is one of the forms of Shiva, said to be fearsome and formidable. The consort of Shiva in this case is called Bhairavi (Shakti) . . . that is, the power that manifests this particular aspect of existence.

There is a distinct sect of tantra who worship this aspect of Shiva and Shakti. They are called bhairavis. There is also a wellknown tantric text called the *Bhairava Tantra*.

For the purpose of meditative practice, this is a particularly comfortable mudra. What is easier than placing the hands one on top of the other in the lap, while sitting in a meditation asana? It is a mudra that people do almost automatically.

SHOONYA MUDRA

The word *shoonya* means 'voidness' or 'emptiness'. It is used by Buddhists to describe the indescribable state of *nirvana*, supreme enlightenment. In this context it does not mean, as so many people think and



write, a state of nothingness; it means exactly the opposite: a state of totality, of oneness, devoid of ego, devoid of even the slightest turmoil, craving or dissatisfaction.

MAHAYONI MUDRA



This is a mudra that is widely practised in tantric circles. The word *maha* means 'great' or perhaps even better in this context 'supreme'. The word *yon*i means 'womb', 'source' or 'origin'. Therefore, this mudra can be called the 'supreme source mudra'.

This is such an important mudra for it symbolizes the unity between the individual and consciousness. It symbolizes the return of the individual to his source, his origin. It is not only a symbol, for this mudra is used to help invoke this realization and experience. It is such a simple looking practice, but it possesses vast power of invocation, if it is done under the correct circumstances.



To perform this mudra you will need to wrap and bend your fingers in a weird combination of directions. Having formed the mudra as shown in the two figures you can either hold the hands in front of the chest or rest them on your lap. The choice is yours.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

Pranayama: Practice

In Lesson 12 we introduced you to the fourth stage of nadi shodhana pranayama called bahir kumbhaka¹. We emphasized that you should not hold your breath for a long duration after exhalation in the early stages of practice. This is important. We suggested that you hold your breath externally for no longer than the duration of inhalation. That is, if you breathe in for a count of 5 (seconds), then you should also do bahir kumbhaka for no longer than a count of 5 (seconds); if you inhale for 3 seconds then outer retention should only be for 3 seconds. And so on. If you have mastered this, and if you simultaneously have no strain or difficulty in performing inhalation, exhalation and antar kumbhaka (inner retention with control), then increase the duration of bahir kumbhaka.

The previous ratio given was 1:8:6:1:1:8:6:1 for the complete practice¹. If you have mastered this ratio, then you can adopt a new ratio as follows: 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 for inhalation: antar kumbhaka: exhalation: bahir kumbhaka: inhalation: antar kumbhaka: exhalation: bahir kumbhaka.

Don't strain. The motto should be 'slowly, slowly'.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 4

Meditation: Chidakasha Dharana

Each of us at one time or another has looked at the sky and stars at night and felt an ineffable awe at the immensity of everything. Some feel an inexpressible joy while others feel a sense of complete insignificance compared to this infinite colossus called the cosmos. Some people may become a little depressed yet this is not necessary if each and everyone of us also looked inwards to the unfathomable depths of the internal cosmos of the mind. This inner universe is just as awesome, breathtaking, stupendous and exciting as its outer equivalent; in fact, it is more so. It is also infinite in extent. It is limitless. It is by knowing the nature of the inner cosmos that one ceases to feel totally dwarfed by the outer cosmos. This is the whole reason for meditation practices.

In Sanskrit the material universe around us is called the *mahakasha*. The word *maha* means 'great', and *akasha* means 'space' or 'ether'. Therefore, *mahakasha* literally means 'the great space' or 'ether'. It is the exploration of the *mahakasha*, the external universe, that almost everyone has been totally concerned with in the past and today. This applies to the farmer, the engineer, the sailor and the astronaut. They are all exploring the potential of the material cosmos in their own way.

It is a sad thing, yet nevertheless a fact, that very few people make any attempt to explore the inner cosmos. They don't even know of its existence. Man continues to go further and further into outer space but neglects the infinite within himself. Almost everyone is so engrossed in looking outwards that they forget to look inwards. In Sanskrit the inner cosmos is called the *chidakasha*; the word *chit* means 'consciousness'. Therefore, the literal translation of the word *chidakasha* is 'the space of consciousness'. In the *mahakasha* we see the material world and the innumerable occurrences and forms of the macrocosm. In the *chidakasha* it is possible, though few realize

it, to view the infinite psychic events occurring within each and every human being. This is the aim of all meditation practices, including the practice we will now discuss, called *chidakasha dharana*.

CHIDAKASHA DHARANA

This is one of the most widely used techniques in yoga. It is generally incorporated with other practices. It is concerned with the mind screen; with watching the space (*chidakasha*) in front of the closed eyes. The word *dharana* means 'to concentrate' or 'to be aware'. This technique can be called 'awareness of the inner space of consciousness'.

Much ado about nothing

Just for a minute or so, close your eyes. What do you see? You should see a space in front of your closed eyes. It is something you have seen many times before, but have probably never paid much attention to it. The space may be black, it may be dark orange or it may be any other colour. But there should be a space, ether or a firmament in front of your closed eyes. It may seem rather insignificant. This is the mind screen. It is on this screen that you will, with sufficient practice and relaxation, see the most incredible psychic events – events that you never dreamed were taking place within you. Watch and see for yourself by doing meditation practices. At first you will see nothing for you will be too tense. You may not see anything for many months, but there will come a time when you will be suddenly confronted with the most incredible psychic film show you have ever seen.

This mind screen can also be likened to a cave the cave or entrance to the depths of your mind. Consider a real cave in the side of a mountain. If you stand outside and look into the cave you will see nothing. You must have experienced this for yourself. All you

can see is an impenetrable wall of blackness, so black that you cannot see anything in the cave. Then as you start to walk in the cave and your eyes slowly become accustomed to the murky darkness, you begin to see things. These things were there previously, but you were unable to perceive them. Now you begin to see them. You begin to see more and more things. The cave that before seemed to be only blackness, is seen to be full of so many objects: rocks, stalactites and stalagmites, litter of all types and perhaps even a hermit meditating in the far corner! As you become more familiar and accustomed to the darkness and nature of the cave, so you see things that you did not previously expect. It is the same with the mind-cave. At first when you look into the cave of the mind you will see nothing. You will most probably be tempted to think that there is nothing there to be seen. But as you look deeper into the depths of the mind-cave you will begin to see things that previously were inconceivable. Things were already there – they did not magically appear; but they were there without your knowledge, without your awareness. You start to develop awareness of your inner being. This is *chidakasha dharana*.

So we urge you to explore the cave of your mind and find out what is contained within. It will be the most profitable expedition that you have ever made and will ever make.

Posture

Any comfortable sitting pose can be used.

Technique

Make yourself comfortable in your chosen sitting position.

Adjust yourself so that there will be no need to move your body during the practice.

Make sure that your spine and head are erect, but without excessive arching or straining of the back; sit in a comfortable and upright position.

Close your eyes. Start the practice.

Stage 1: body awareness

Practise *kaya sthairyam*¹.

Be completely aware of your body.

There should be a continuous flow of attention to the physical body.

The more you are aware of the body, the more steady will the mind become; steadiness of the

body automatically implies steadiness of the mind and vice versa.

Rotate your awareness throughout the different parts of your body.

Then become aware of the whole body.

There should be homogeneous awareness of the whole body sitting on the floor; not awareness of one part of the body, but the entire body, which you can feel as a totality.

Remain aware and feel the immobility of the body.

Feel that your body is like a stone statue.

Eventually there will be no need to create the feeling, it will come spontaneously.

Continue to do *kaya sthairyam* for about 5 minutes, or for as long as time permits.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: Aum chanting

Chant AUM seven times . . . slowly.

Feel the vibrations resonating, reverberating throughout the whole body.

Be completely absorbed, aware of the sound of Aum.

Feel that nothing else exists except Aum.

When you have finished, proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: breath awareness

Be aware of your breathing process; if you wish you can practise *anuloma viloma* and *prana shuddhi*².

Fix your attention on your own breath.

Let your breathing be natural.

Don't force or try to control it.

Be aware of the breath as it flows in and out of your nostrils.

You breathe in . . .

You breathe out . . .

And when you breathe in, know that you are breathing in; when you are breathing out, know that you are breathing out.

Total awareness of the effortless, natural breathing.

Usually, the breathing occurs without your awareness – it occurs unconsciously. Now you must feel it, know that it is continuously taking place within you.

You must be aware of it, as though you have never breathed before.

Imagine that this is the first time you have ever breathed; feel and experience the bliss of breathing.

There must be unbroken and unceasing awareness of the breathing process.
Listen to the sound of the breath.
Feel the breath flow in and out of the nostrils.
Continue in this way for a few minutes.
Then try to feel the air entering each nostril separately.

As you breathe in, the two flows of air move upwards and meet at the eyebrow centre.

As you breathe out, the two flows of air diverge from the eyebrow centre and move downwards in the shape of an inverted V.

The air flow in each nostril forms a triangular pathway, with the top of the triangle at the eyebrow centre.

Continue to experience this alternate convergence and divergence of breath flow as you inhale and exhale respectively.

Feel the air being sucked in . . .

Feel the air being gently forced out.

Be aware.

Imagine that you are merging with the breath.
Then after some minutes, leave awareness of the breath and proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: chidakasha dharana

Look at the space in front of your closed eyes – chidakasha.

Be relaxed; don't strain.

Merely watch.

Be a witness to anything that may appear, any visions or whatever.

Don't try to interpret or analyze.

Look into the cave of your mind.

Look deeply.

It looks very dark . . . oh, so dark . . . but look deeper.

You may not see anything, but don't worry, just continue your practice.

Expect nothing, only watch.

Be an observer.

After some time you may see colours, streaks of light, visions, strange forms, vivid memories and so on; however, more than likely you will continue to see only an empty screen.

Whatever occurs, remain a disinterested witness.

Let things happen. Don't anticipate anything.

Look into the ether of your being.

Peer into the darkness as though you are trying to find something in a dark room.

Look at the totality of chidakasha; don't confine your attention to any one place . . .

Let your vision take in the full extent of chidakasha in the same way that you would take in the whole screen of a television or cinema.

Survey the whole screen of the mind.

Observe . . . observe . . . and continue to observe.

You don't have to do anything, only watch.

This is so simple, but can bring incredible experiences if you persist.

So persevere, and find out the multi-dimensional activities of the mind.

But don't expect . . . the less you expect, the more you will see.

Continue in this way for about 5 or 10 minutes; more if you have time to spare.

Then proceed to stage 5.

Stage 5: concentration or trataka

This stage is for those people who can mentally create and easily visualize an inner symbol on the mind screen³.

Visualize and concentrate on your chosen symbol created on the mind screen.

You can choose any symbol that suits you . . .

But you must be able to visualize a clear, steady image.

Be completely aware of the symbol.

Try to imagine that there is nothing else but the symbol.

Your whole awareness is channelled towards the symbol.

This will make your whole mind one-pointed . . .

This will lead into the deeper realms of the mind.

This symbol will be your rocket into the internal depths of space, into the ether of consciousness.

Continue this practice for as long as you are able.

Then proceed to stage 6.

Stage 6: Aum chanting and chidakasha dharana

Slowly repeat Aum 7 times (more if you have time).

Try to be simultaneously aware of the sound of Aum and chidakasha.

Then at the end of Aum chanting, once again become aware of chidakasha, the space in front of your closed eyes.

Remain a witness to anything that takes place there. If subconscious fears or suppressed feelings surface to your awareness, try only to watch with detachment.

If you see extraordinary visions, don't become excited for there is much more; there will come a time when you will see impossible things, so impossible that you will be totally unable to be emotionally excited.

Continue for a few minutes.

Be aware of your body and of the surroundings.

Then open your eyes.

This is the end of the practice.

Relaxation

Like all other meditation techniques, relaxation of the body and mind is essential. Without this prerequisite you will not gain meaningful and profound experiences. If the mind is disturbed or incessantly thinking about work, family problems or perhaps anticipating the delights of breakfast, then you will achieve little or nothing. It is for this reason the technique of chidakasha dharana that we have described has been combined with other meditation practices. The preliminary techniques of kaya sthairyam, Aum chanting and breath awareness systematically induce deep relaxation. These practices are very important.

However, don't feel obliged to stick to these practices when performing chidakasha dharana. You can combine any other meditative techniques that you feel are justified, or any that you particularly like. The important thing is that you attain deeper states of relaxation. It is in this manner that you will start to dive into the depths of the mind-cave. If you are not reasonably relaxed, both physically and mentally, then you will never penetrate the surface, the veil of the chidakasha. So make sure you systematically relax yourself through any yoga techniques, whether asanas, pranayama or meditative techniques.

Duration

The practice that we have just described should take about half an hour. You can increase or decrease the duration according to available time by either extending or contracting the time of the stages, or by omitting certain stages or adding stages of your choice. You must use your discretion in this respect.

Whatever meditation technique you do, try to finish off by watching the mind screen for a few minutes.

Removal of mental problems

We don't intend to become too deeply involved in this subject here, for we have already treated it in depth⁴. All we want to do is to indicate that chidakasha dharana is a powerful tool for helping to remove mental blocks, fear, etc. As we said previously it is important to first of all recognize one's mental problems before they can be removed. The majority of the mental problems of most people lie embedded in the subconscious realms of the mind, just below the level of conscious perception. That is, immediately behind the veil of blackness that you see when you close your eyes. It is there that the roots or seeds of all mental problems lie. These seeds cause unhappiness and disharmony by erupting, by sprouting, by manifesting into the conscious realms. A large proportion of people remain totally unaware of the cause of their unhappiness or dissatisfaction throughout their entire lives. By regularly doing chidakasha dharana, one can see the source of mental problems and in turn remove them.

You should clearly understand (perhaps it is better to find out for yourself) that the language of the subconscious mind is not words – it is the language of symbols, of psychic symbols. The subconscious mind speaks in symbols, whether it is through dreams or during the practice of meditative techniques such as chidakasha dharana. Subconscious problems are stored, so to say, in the mind in the form of symbols. When one confronts these symbols in a state of relaxed awareness, then they can be removed. The reader should take note that we did not say that the symbols should be confronted in a state of relaxation, for this means sleep to most people, and one's subconscious problems can never be eradicated during sleep. The symbols must be faced in a state of relaxation combined with awareness. You must be fully awake when you confront these psychic manifestations. This is the role of chidakasha dharana.

In a sense, one works out one's subconscious problems in symbolic form. It is more than likely that there will be little or no intellectual understanding of the cleansing process, but the process will nevertheless take place. But you must practise regularly.

It is essential that you merely watch the psychic symbols with as much detachment as

possible. This indifference and lack of emotional response to these psychic visions in deeper states of relaxation will tend to carry over into daily life. In this way, things that previously caused fear or conflict or whatever will cease to do so. The scourge of subconscious fears etc. will cease to plague you and make your life unhappy.

There is another reason why it is important to be a witness to occurrences on the mind screen: it is only by watching, by being a witness that you allow subconscious data to freely arise to conscious perception. It is only in this way that the subconscious bubbles of the mind can spontaneously reach the surface. If you expect something you will only hinder the process.

There is another important use of chidakasha dharana. Previously we discussed the method of desensitization⁵. This is a method where one purposely and consciously creates a mental image of objects of fear or phobia on the mind screen, while in states of relaxation. In this manner, the more obvious psychological problems can be purged. Chidakasha dharana is ideally suited for this purpose, for one merely tries to create and project the object of neurosis on to the mind screen as part of the practice of chidakasha dharana. A good time to practise this technique would be at the end of stage 6 in the method we have given in this topic.

Remember, the purpose of meditation practices such as chidakasha dharana is not only to remove your gross mental problems, it is also to dive into the depths of the mind. The psychic manifestation of subconscious mental problems arise only from the superficial layers of the mind. The grosser problems exist in seed form just below the surface of the mind ocean. You will confront them in the earlier stages of meditation practices. The eventual aim is to go much deeper into the depths of the mind. Once these levels are contacted and experienced, your life will shake at the very foundations, not catastrophically but with joy.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

³ For a more detailed explanation on trataka refer to: Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

⁴ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2

Tantra

This discussion is not intended to be practical. It has been included to give you a general background and introduction to tantra. Many of the ideas may seem a little strange at first, yet the more one delves into tantra the more one will understand its sublimity. Its philosophical concepts reach up to the loftiest heights in an effort to express the inexpressible, yet they have not lost touch with practical application. Many philosophies become lost in words and are not applicable to the average person. They formulate complicated conceptions that in no way relate to the individual and his attempts to grapple with and understand life. They rarely make any effort to show the individual how he can experience higher awareness for himself. Tantra, on the other hand, is a practical system. It is called a *sadhana shastra*, which means that it is a practice-oriented scripture. Its purpose is to give each and every individual spiritual illumination by any means that is suitable and available. It consists of a vast number of different practices to suit all types of people, combined with the highest concepts realized by tantric sages throughout the ages in states of deep meditation. It is because of this combination that we have such high regard for tantra.

We want you to consider tantra with an open mind. Do not blindly accept its ideas. Merely assimilate them. You must prove for yourself if they are really valid through your own personal experience and realization. The thing to remember is that tantra is more of a science than anything else. It does not ask you to believe anything on face value. It is a 'test and see' system. Only when you have the experience can you believe what you hear. The essence of tantra is personal experience through practice.

The science of the infinite

Tantra is the science of seeing, feeling, knowing the infinite in and through the finite.

It leads one to the experience of the infinite through the limited world of form. And once the infinite has been seen in one object, it is then a short step to seeing the infinite in everything. Tantra teaches knowledge and experience of the macrocosm through the instrumentality of the microcosm. It teaches knowledge of the unlimited through the means of the limited; knowledge of the supreme consciousness (paramatman) through knowledge of the individual consciousness (jivatman). Tantra is a means to know your divine nature and then the divine nature of everything. It is a method of using the material to tune in with the immaterial, of using the manifest to know the unmanifest. It is a method of being swallowed into the infinite, of being sucked into the infinite through a whirlpool of material objects and energies. The world is used as a stepping stone to the beyond, to that which is indescribable. The objective universe is used as a launching pad into the eternal. Tantra aims at expanding the experience of everyday life, of enjoying and living life to the full, as a means to higher awareness. It encompasses all aspects of life, whether in the material world or that which is transcendent.

Tantra – the universal system

Tantra is in the widest sense a universal system. It has been and still is a way of life for various diverse groups of people throughout the world. Though there may be local differences, the basic premise is fundamentally the same: that for the sake of understanding, worship and spiritual practices, existence is divided into two aspects – the unmanifested and the manifested. In fact, the real nature of the world and existence is way beyond even this concept, but this must be realized in higher states of awareness. For practical purposes it is convenient to make this division. In Indian tantra, the subject of this topic, these two

aspects are called Shiva (consciousness) and Shakti (power or energy of manifestation). For the sake of convenience and symbology, Shakti is regarded as the cosmic mother. In modern language, she is referred to as mother nature, though few people who use this term realize its origin and significance.

This concept is not confined to India. In Taoism of China there is *Tao* and *Teh*. The Tao corresponds to Shiva (though there are some slight reservations about this) and Teh is exactly the same as Shakti or the mother of the universe. The ancient Egyptians worshipped Osiris (consciousness or Shiva) and Isis (the mother, Shakti, or the cosmic power of manifestation). In Christianity there is the Virgin Mary – a symbol of the universal mother. The father, needless to say, is consciousness. The first two cards of the Tarot pack are the Magus and veiled Isis, representing consciousness and the power of manifestation respectively. And so we could go on giving so many other examples, but this is not the place. What we want to indicate is that the concept of the cosmic mother and the accompanying symbol or personification of consciousness does *not* depend on time, place and race. The concept is universal, it is ingrained deeply in the collective psyche of humanity.

Tantra is a system that carries on the tradition that has been practised throughout the world since time immemorial. It is not really something that has been invented; it is an expression of the deeper realizations of man. The system of tantra (universal tantra, not necessarily the form prevalent in India) has been practised for good reasons – the most obvious being that this concept or understanding of existence has been found to be true up as far as reasonably elevated levels of awareness. This division of Shiva and Shakti is verifiable by personal experience from moderate states of awareness to elevated levels of awareness. This concept has been found to be valid by mystics in states of meditation. It is the expression of mystical experiences of countless sages, yogis, saints, etc. throughout the ages. It has been formulated because of realizations in states of meditation. It is only at indescribable levels of awareness that the concept breaks down . . . and this is still covered by tantra, for Shiva and Shakti merely become one and the same. So bear this in

mind – the concept of Shiva and Shakti and all the other similar personifications throughout the history of mankind are based on mystical experiences.

Another reason why the concept of Shiva and Shakti is so profound is that it is easily amenable to practical application. It was adopted by people throughout the ages because it facilitated powerful spiritual practices which could give an individual his own experience. This concept provides a base from which practices can be used to lead to union, communion with a power far greater than that of the individual. The system of Shiva and Shakti, the system of tantra throughout the world, leads to higher awareness, knowledge and beatitude.

An integral part of tantra is the use of sound in the form of mantras as a method of invoking higher forces. In English, mantras can be called incantations. Magic circles (mandalas and yantras) are also used. Both incantations and magic circles are an integral part of many universal systems, both old and new, and especially esoteric systems. And we can still see the remains of ancient magic circles used by ancient peoples. What is Stonehenge in Britain, but a cosmic magic circle? What are the Pyramids, but cosmic mandalas? The Mayan pyramids of Central America are surely mandalas, places for the invocation of higher vibrations. We could give thousands of examples, and they would all be rather obvious ones. There are millions of small seemingly insignificant magic circles that one would not normally look at twice and are so commonplace that they are not given any thought. For example, here in India almost every large tree has some form of altar as its base. Each and every one is a mandala, though more than likely the people who built them did not realize this.

To repeat: the essence of tantra is universal. It comes naturally to the psyche of man in general. It is not something that is imposed as are many other things in life. The essence of tantra comes naturally to man, even modern, city dwelling man, for though one can make superficial changes to one's life, there are certain things that stir the very depths of one's being. The essence of tantra is ingrained in the psyche of every man, as it has been in the peoples of bygone eras.

Tantra defined

We are now talking about tantra as it exists in India.

The word tantra is made up of two words: *tanoti* and *trayati*. The word *tanoti* means 'to expand', 'to stretch', and to 'extend', while the word *trayati* means 'to liberate' or 'free'. Therefore, *tantra* (tan+tra) means to expand one's experience and awareness of everything, to extend the frontiers of apprehension beyond the material, and hence to attain spiritual knowledge and liberation.

Tantra is also known as *tantrica*, *kauladharma*, *kaulica* or *kaula*. The word *kaula* is derived from the word *kula*, which means family, society or community. Thus *kaula*, *kaulica* and *kauladharma* can be interpreted as the way of the community, the way of the family, or perhaps the way of brotherhood and fellowship. The word *kula* also means the fetters of the family, but this is in a different context. The word *kula* also means 'the cosmic power of manifestation' (Shakti), and *akula* means 'consciousness' (Shiva). Therefore, the path of *kaula* is the unity of Shiva and Shakti, cosmic union, or nirvana. It is said that the system of *kaula* implies simplicity of living combined with harmony of inner and outer surroundings, together with understanding and acceptance of others. The dormant cosmic power in man is often known as *kulakundalini*. Therefore, *kauladharma* is a system for unleashing the cosmic forces and potential (*kundalini* or Shakti) in man.

People who follow the path of tantra are called *tantrics*, *kaulas* or *kaulicas*.

Tantra is a system intended to teach us how to live life to the fullest. It is a means to successfully come to terms with life and its seeming complications and eventually become enlightened.

Scope

Tantra is really a compendium of many other systems, for it includes and encompasses a wide selection of the different aspects of human life. It is concerned with the realms of the physical, psychic, mental and spiritual. It is concerned with work, play, devotion, thought and so many other parts of human affairs. A tantric text called the *Varahi Tantra* gives an elaborate description of the main subject of tantra. They are summarized as follows:

1. Consciousness
2. The creation and destruction of the physical universe (*shruti* and *pralaya*)
3. Worship of deities (*devi* or *deva pooja*)
4. Classification of beings
5. The heavenly bodies – astronomy and astrology
6. The different levels of awareness (*lokas*)
7. The psychic pathways and centres in the human framework (*nadis* and *chakras*)
8. Laws and duties in society
9. Sacramental rites (*samskaras*)
10. Consecration of forms of deities (*murtis*)
11. Incantation (*mantras*)
12. Magic circles (*mandalas* and *yantras*)
13. Symbolic and invocative gestures (*mudras*)
14. Spiritual practices (*sadhana*)
15. Worship (*pooja*) both internal and external
16. Consecration of houses, wells, etc.
17. Description of holy shrines
18. Magic (*yogamaya sadhana*)
19. Ceremonial rites and initiations (*diksha*)
20. Yoga – including *asanas*, *pranayama*, meditative methods, etc.
21. Medicine of many types, including *ayur-veda* which is a herbal science combined with yogic practices
22. Science.

To this list we would add that tantra also included alchemy, the art of living a fruitful and blissful life, and the use of sexual energy as a means to unfold higher awareness.

Thus it can be seen that tantra includes a wide range of topics. At one time in history, it is said that there were 14,000 tantric texts in existence. Now, only a few texts remain for most of the traditional texts have been lost or destroyed.

It should be remembered that present day Hinduism is almost entirely based on tantra; it is not based completely on the Vedas as so many people think. The principal deities of the Vedas are Prajapati, Agni, Indra, Varuna, etc., and these are not an integral part of modern Hinduism. To the best of our knowledge there are almost no temples erected to these Vedic deities in present day India. Vishnu (the sustainer), Shiva (the auspicious and the dissolver), Saraswati (patron of knowledge and learning), Kali (Shakti), Durga (another aspect of Shakti), etc., are all key deities in Hinduism. Temples by the thousands upon thousands exist throughout India dedicated to

these deities. And they all stem directly from tantra. Of course, very few people would accept this, for tantra has fallen into some disrepute through misunderstanding. But as far as we are concerned Hindus are unknowingly closer to tantra than they believe.

The scope of tantra is vast. It is intended to cover every aspect of man's life from early morning to late at night, from birth till death. It is intended to make life more harmonious and blissful in every action and situation. It is for all types of people, from housewives to monks. It is a system that teaches us how to fully know and use the world we live in, as well as to tune in with higher consciousness.

Practical tantra is often summed up by three main aspects: tantra (here meaning the rules, principles and the system), mantra (the vehicle of consciousness) and mandala or yantra (the form of consciousness). This is a terse definition that probably will not convey much at first reading. But within these three aspects is included everything in the material universe. This of course is taking the fullest possible meaning of the words, but we can say that everything around us is composed of mantra and yantra. This includes each and every human being.

The origin and development

No definite date can be assigned to the beginning of tantra. It was not invented or formulated as such. Its nebulous beginnings lie in the mist of prehistory. It did not arise through the inspiration of one person, as did Buddhism, Christianity, etc. It grew slowly throughout the ages. It developed in all parts of the world. It did not follow a fixed pattern of growth, but varied according to local circumstances and the influence of different tantric sages or yogis. Often, the methods in different localities seemed to contradict each other, but this was only on a superficial level – they were all a part of tantra.

Tantra in India started to be moulded into a semblance of the system as we now know it when man learned the art of writing. Since that time, thousands of tantric texts have been written, many of which often contradict each other over minor points. But this is not surprising, for the attitudes of societies also change; what is suitable for one society is often unsuitable for another. Of course, the essence

is the same and they all fit into the system of tantra.

The starting point of tantra is that one should be tolerant of other people's views, for differences are generally only superficial. Seemingly opposing viewpoints generally point to the same truth. Because of this attitude of tolerance and understanding, tantra slowly encompassed and fused together various beliefs, forms of worship and techniques. The main sects of tantra will be discussed briefly: they are *shaktas*, *shaivites* and *vaishnavites*. They are all part of tantra. Even though they may appear to say and believe in different things, they really say and believe in the same thing. This diversity of thought is a noticeable characteristic of tantra. This arose because tantra opened its arms and embraced a wide range of systems, even though they seemed contrary or mutually exclusive. It did not try to eradicate seemingly antagonistic beliefs. This attitude of tolerance can only arise when a system grows naturally in an environment of openness, joy and freedom, devoid of dogma. This can only happen when a system brings the results and experiences that it promises, when it actually produces peace and contentment among its followers, when it actually makes people more aware and understanding. Dogma can only arise when people are unhappy, when they live in low states of awareness, and when through lack of experience they are both unsure of themselves and the doctrine that they follow. Tantra brings bliss and higher consciousness. It brings about that which it talks about, that which it promises. It does not talk about castles in the sky and about things that people cannot actually experience for themselves.

Tantra is a system that grew naturally with man, as he evolved (here we mean evolution in an historical sense). It was not thrust on man. It was a way of life which developed spontaneously as man moved through and lived in the various bygone eras. A system that is imposed on man causes disruption in the same way that the Eskimo mode of life would cause disruption if it was forcibly imposed on the people of India. It does not fit. Tantra, in its multitudinous forms, grew and matured with man as he adapted to new situations and adopted new ways of living. It is for this reason that tantra is both tolerant and practical – it

developed naturally in response to man's needs.

Tantra is widely said to be based on the Vedas. This is, however, very disputable for there is much evidence to suggest that the root of tantra predates the writing of the Vedas, just as it seems that tantra in other forms existed in Europe long before the writing of the Bible. This is a very nebulous subject, for we must also remember that the vedic system must also have existed long before it was put in written form. It is probably truer to say that the origin of both the vedic and tantric ways of life are lost in the depths of prehistory. It is really impossible to say which arose first.

People tend to use texts as a method of dating the origin of the tantric and vedic systems, and this is not a very realistic indicator. The oldest known tantric texts were written after the Vedas. This is clearly implied by the fact that the Vedas were written in Vedic Sanskrit, whereas the tantric scriptures were written in the later Paniniya Sanskrit of this upanishadic era. Because of this fact, historians have automatically assumed that tantra comes from the Vedas. Nearly all modern books on this subject have made this assumption, but it is not really a logical conclusion for various reasons. Firstly, it is a possibility that the oldest tantric texts have been lost (remember the tantric belief that old texts will become redundant and automatically disappear). Secondly, the date of the oldest tantric scriptures does not necessarily fix the era when tantra started to become a thriving way of life. Tantra must have existed long before it was recorded in written form, it is an evolved system, not a suddenly created system. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how tantra arose directly from the Vedas when the texts are so different. There are many similarities also, but the differences are more noticeable. The safest thing that can be said is that both systems arose gradually at some indefinite time in the past. It is almost impossible and a little presumptuous to say that one arose from the other. There are so many facts that indicate otherwise. Of course, they influenced each other when they came in contact . . . sometimes negatively, other times positively.

This subject could be discussed indefinitely, but we will close the issue at this point. The important thing is that both systems have their

use; they have both been abused in various ways; both have been misinterpreted and both have accumulated their cobwebs. Both systems used in the way that was originally intended can bring harmony in all spheres of life and eventual transcendence.

Tantra arose, not in order to renounce or to escape the world, but in order to experience the things of the world more fully, and at the same time to use the ways of the world to attain higher states of awareness. It is a spiritual system, a psychological system, a psychic system, a science of life – call it what you like. But it is a practical system that produces results and personal experience. It has grown from the experiences and understanding of wise men throughout the ages. Tantra is not a stagnant system; it is a system that adapts itself to the needs of the times. In fact, it is a tantric belief that old texts on tantra will fade away and new ones will always be written to replace them. The essence of the texts will be the same, but the expression and relationship to prevalent social conditions will be different. Tantra has changed and been developed throughout the ages. It has not remained attached to a fixed dogma. It is still growing and adapting itself in the present era and will continue to mould itself to man's needs in the future.

Texts and sects

Tantra consists of a large number of sects and subsects, which have characteristically different rituals and modes of spiritual practice. This seems a little confusing and contradictory to those who are not familiar with the implications of tantra. Basically, of course, all the sects follow the same path, for the differences, even those that seem the greatest, are merely different ways of expressing and eventually experiencing the same thing. However, one must be careful in making generalities about tantra, for it is so easy to make one definite statement about tantra only to find that the opposite is clearly written in some obscure tantric text. This must be the case for as we have already said, tantra has embraced many systems within its fold throughout the ages. Having said this, however, we can say that tantra can be divided into five sects, according to the deity which is worshipped and the basis of their sadhana. These are as follows:

Sect	Deity	Literature
Vaishnavas (or Vaishnavites)	Vishnu	Vaishnava Agamas (Pancharatra)
Shaivas (or Shaivites)	Shiva	Shaiva Agamas
Shaktas	Shakti	Shakta Agamas
Sauras	Surya (the sun)	Saura Agamas
Ganapatyas	Ganapati	Ganapatya Agamas

Remember that the presiding deity can be worshipped in many aspects. For example, Shakti has hundreds of different traditional aspects, all of which can be included in shakta sadhana.

The tantric texts are often called agamas, and less often nigamas. The texts of the shaiva and shakta sects are generally given in the form of a dialogue between Shiva (deva) and his consort Shakti (devi). Where the questions are posed by Shakti and the answers given by Shiva, the texts are known as *agamas*. In an ancient text called the *Agamadvaita Nirnaya* it states: "An agama is so called because it proceeds from the mouth of Shambhu (Shiva) and is conveyed to Girija (Shakti, his wife), having first been approved by Vasudeva (Vishnu)."

Shiva plays the role of the spiritual teacher (*guru*) and Shakti plays the part of the disciple (*shishya*). Sometimes, however, Shakti acts as the teacher, as she does, for example, in a scripture called the *Nigama Kalpadruma*. In this case the scripture, (shastra) is called nigama. In the *Agamadvaita Nirnaya* it also says: "Nigama is so called because it emanates from Girija (Shakti) to be heard by the ears of Girisa (Shiva), having been approved by Vasudeva (Vishnu)." Thus, in the case of nigamas, Shakti is the guru. What we have so far said applies mainly to the shaiva and shakta sects. This form of dialogue between the teacher and the disciple is significant for it shows the importance of the guru-disciple relationship. This is a fundamental aspect of tantra. The texts of the other sects are also usually called agamas though the form is not a dialogue between Shiva and Shakti.

Let us briefly consider the five main sects.

Vaishnavas

The presiding deity of this group is Vishnu (the sustainer), who is said to maintain and uphold

the universe. Vishnu is said to appear in incarnation whenever mankind is in spiritual and material need. So far, nine incarnations (*avatars*) have come, including Rama and Krishna. The tenth and last, it is believed, will come in the future. He is Kalki, and it is believed he will bring the present Kali age to an end and bring the new golden age. The wife of Vishnu is Lakshmi, who represents prosperity in all spheres. This group includes vast numbers of people in India today, though very few would admit to following the path of tantra. In fact, they would probably be offended if you made such a suggestion, for much abuse has been heaped on tantra through misunderstanding. This sect of tantra has been absorbed into the main stream of Hinduism, of which it is probably the most popular and most widely practised path. It is mainly a path of devotion (*bhakti*) and thousands of beautiful stirring songs have been composed and are sung as an expression of this devotion.

The two most popular avatars of Vishnu are Rama and Krishna. Rama is the main figure of the mythological masterpiece called the *Ramayana*, in which his wife is Sita. This wonderful epic tells the universal story, in allegorical form, of the battle each person must pass through to know higher consciousness. Krishna is the subject of many books and the central figure of the world famous masterpiece, the *Bhagavad Gita*. His consort is usually known as Radha.

The literature of the vaishnavites is commonly called the *Pancharatra* (five nights). It is so called because this sect is associated with five special nights of worship and ritual during the year. These five nights are said to be very auspicious on the spiritual path. In the *Mahabharata*, an immense Indian epic, it is said that the sage Narada acquired the knowledge contained within the *Pancharatra* from Rishi Narayana (Vishnu). Narayana acted as the guru and taught his consort Lakshmi (the deity of prosperity).

Pancharatra literature is said to consist of 108 agamas, but in fact the actual number is not certain. According to the *Sammohanan Tantra*, vaishnava literature consists of 75 tantras, 205 upatantras, as well as various yamalas and damaras. In this context, the tantras and the upatantras are intended for people who are receptive to spiritual experi-

ences (sattwa), the yamalas for those people who are more active in nature (rajas), and the damaras are intended for those who lack any spiritual aspiration whatsoever (tamas). Most of the *Pancharatra* texts have been lost or destroyed. Among the texts that are still available are the *Vishnu Rahasya* and the *Mahasatanthumar Samhitas*.

The vaishnava sect has spread beyond the shores of India. It is very popular in many parts of Southeast Asia, especially in Bali, Cambodia, Thailand, Java, etc. In all these places, many temples have been erected for the worship of Vishnu.

Shaivism

This group worships and bases its practices on tuning in and harmonizing directly with consciousness. It personifies consciousness in the form of Lord Shiva, who is the substratum from which the manifested world arises by the action of Shakti. It is a sect that tends more towards renunciation, both mentally and physically; though for practical purposes it is only the mental renunciation that is really important. The basic philosophy of shaivism is the same as the shaktas. It says that the absolute Brahman is both static and dynamic. It is all pervading and transcendental (consciousness) and dynamic (energy). The static is Shiva and the dynamic is Shakti. The entire created universe is no more than a play of Shakti. The whole world is not really an illusion, in a higher sense, but the expression of Shakti. Shaivites worship the static aspect, whereas the shaktas worship the dynamic aspect. The practices of shaivism are based on the static aspect, whereas the shakta practices are based mainly on the dynamic, manifested aspect. The purpose and the end point are the same.

The worshippers or followers of this sect are called shaivites and have a particularly large following in South India. There are various schools of shaivism of which the main ones are:

1. *Northern advaita*, which is also called *Kashmir shaivism* and *trika* (i.e. the system of the trinity – supreme consciousness, individual consciousness and the material world).
2. *Southern shaivism*, which is also, called *Shaiva siddhanta*, the principle or doctrine of Shiva. Other sects include nathas, kramas, bhairavas etc.

The aim of shaivism is to dissolve all mental modifications so that one can see that which is beyond thought. To bring about this experience it uses a large number of practices. In fact, we can say that yoga in its many forms is the very essence of practical shaivism. Probably the most important mantra is *Shivoham* (I am Shiva) which is repeated over and over again in the heart centre.

It is said that there are twenty-eight traditional texts of shaivism, supposed to have been revealed by Shiva personified in an aspect with five heads. Each of the five mouths is said to have spoken and contributed to the total 28 texts. The name of each of these tantras is well known but they are not readily available. Possibly they have all been destroyed. Information on them is rather vague.

Apart from these traditional texts there are large numbers of other texts, especially within the two principal shaiva sects that we have previously mentioned. The southern shaiva school has produced many elevating and inspiring texts that combine the highest realm of thought with overwhelming devotion. For example, the *Shiva Rahasya* (the essence of shaivism) is a masterpiece, especially a section called the *Ribhu-gita*. Another wonderful book is a tantric text called the *Tirumandiram* which outlines the precepts of shaiva siddhanta. It was written by a great sage called Tirumular. The text clearly states that the Vedas and the agamas (of tantra) are all inspired spiritual works; they only differ in the emphasis on specific practice. Each of the chapters is actually called a tantra. It is full of sensible instruction and the power of devotion. Though the text is devoted to Shiva, it clearly points out that one will eventually accept and encompass all other deities and beliefs, for they will be seen to be one and the same. There are a large number of other texts on shaivism in the languages of South India. It is strange, however, that for some reason these wonderful texts have never received as much attention as they deserve by people outside shaivism.

Kashmir shaivism has also produced tantric texts that reach the loftiest heights of philosophical thought combined with practical application. Its principal scripture is called the *Shiva Sutra* (science of shaivism) and is said to have been revealed to the great seer Vasugupta in the eighth or ninth century. It

is a text that fully encompasses the Samkhya philosophy (used in the path of jnana yoga) and adds much more. It maps out the path of evolution of the manifested universe (which includes each and every individual) from the absolute to the material. It is a masterpiece. It says that both Shiva and Shakti originate from the absolute, which they call Parasamvit. You must read the text for yourself. This same school of Shaivism has also produced many other books, such as the *Paramarthasara* (which roughly translates as the meaning of the supreme essence), *Vijnanabhairava* (science of the shaivas), *Pratyabhijnahridaya* (the essence or source of knowledge of the absolute) and *Shivastotravali* (hymn of Shiva). There are many other books, too numerous to mention here.

Shaivism is intimately connected with the shivalingam. This is a beautiful symbol that in the highest sense represents consciousness. Many systems throughout the world, past and present, have also worshipped the same symbol or a similar symbol. It is for this reason that we can say that the essence of Indian shaivism is universal. It is only the localized expression that is different.

Shaktas

Followers of this path base their practices on worship of Shakti, the cosmic power that creates, sustains and eventually withdraws the universe. This includes each and every individual. Shakti is rooted in and is the active form of the passive, unchanging aspect which is known as consciousness (Shiva). This split is made as a convenient method of trying to explain the unexplainable. The individual consciousness is rooted in and is Shiva, whereas the body and mind are manifestations of Shakti. Therefore, the sadhana of the shaktas is concerned with purification and use of the body, mind and the material world in general as a way of tuning in with the underlying consciousness. The emphasis is on Shakti because this is the manifestation of consciousness, and it is through the manifestation of Shakti in one's own body and mind that one can attain the supreme experience. Therefore, the shaktas are worshippers of Shakti. They use the manifested world as a means of going beyond. They see the world as a place to be used and enjoyed in order to merge with consciousness. It is here that the followers of

shaiva and shakta differ from each other: the shaivists say renounce and lose interest in the world of objects as much as possible, whereas the shaktas say that the world should be used and enjoyed. The end point is the same – transcendence.

The shaktas depict Shakti in a vast number of forms. She is widely known as Kali, Tara, Devi, Tripura, Sundari, Bhairavi, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Durga and many more. These different aspects of cosmic energy are depicted as feminine figures or goddesses. In the widest sense, the shaktas worship everything in the world, for every object from the tiniest atom to the largest star is a manifestation, an expression of the cosmic power called Shakti. To the shaivite, she is the consort and inseparable half of Shiva-Shakti. To the vaishnavites, she is the wondrous splendour in the heart of Vishnu. To the shaktas, she is the mother of all the universe, who controls the creation, sustenance and dissolution of everything.

These feminine forms are merely convenient ways of representing specific aspects of this cosmic power. And of course, this cosmic power is not really feminine just as Shiva (consciousness) is not really masculine. They are denoted and portrayed in female and male forms only for convenience of understanding. Shakti is regarded as feminine for it is within the womb of a woman that new life grows and is created. Thus, the development of the foetus in the womb of a woman is very symbolic of the continuous process where the material universe grows in the cosmic womb of Shakti. What better way is there to depict this cosmic process in terms that the average man and woman can understand?

The path of the shaktas is to accept and use the forces that we see, feel and experience around us. The aim is to create harmony between the individual and the environment. This will bring calmness, acceptance, and understanding in relation to the world we live in. This contentment, together with the harnessing of cosmic forces through the use of mantras, yantras, etc. is a means to higher awareness. It is also the means to gain control of the world in which we live at all levels, whether physical, psychic, mental or whatever.

The literature of the shakta sect is extensive. Many of its texts are widely known and used. They include the following: *kulamava*,

kamadhenu, kubjika, tantraraja, varahi, nila, jnanarnava, gayatri, yogini, rudra yamala and the *bhuttashuddhi* tantras. There are many, many more. The *kama sutra*, *kama ratna* and other texts concerning sexual relations and techniques can also be included among shakta literature. One of the most recent and comprehensive tantric texts is called the *Maha Nirvana Tantra* (supreme liberation of enlightenment). It covers a wide range of subjects, covering metaphysics, philosophy, everyday life, as well as the spiritual path. It deals with the creation and destruction of the universe, mode of liberation from ignorance, nature of Shiva and Shakti, the worship of Brahman, origin and worship of devas (celestial beings), description of the various levels of being (*lokas*) and many other subjects. It is mainly orientated towards practise, and deals extensively with rituals, mantras, yantras, japa, yoga and other forms of practice (*sadhana*). It also deals with everyday life and prescribes rules for harmonizing an individual's interaction with society.

Traditionally, there are 64 texts of the shakta sect, ranging from the *Mahamaya Shambhar* to the *Devimata Tantra*. These texts seem to deal with many things that would appear rather strange to the average person of today. They deal with rituals carried out in graveyards (in the *Yogini Balashambhar*), methods of fulfilling desires (in the *Brahmayamala, Vishnuyamala*, etc.), as well as practices for experiencing and knowing the supreme (in the *Brahmi Tantra, Maheshwari Tantra*, etc.). Many of them are concerned with magic of all types. That is, methods of influencing and controlling the internal and external world through the power of invocation, mantras, etc. A number of the books are intended primarily for monks (*sannyasins*), these including the *Purvamnaya, Paschimamnaya Tantras*, etc. The subjects that these tantras cover are vast and many of them would be easily open to misuse and abuse. If practised by the wrong people, they could be misapplied and used for selfish, destructive ends; this is the realm of what is commonly called 'black magic'. For this reason most of these texts have remained secret, for if they were openly published, they could lead to more harm than good. The prime aim of tantra is enlightenment and these other subjects, if performed for selfish ends, would merely lead one from the prime experience of life.

There is nothing to stop a shakta also being a shaivite, for Shiva and Shakti are intimately related. In practice, the main difference between shaivism and shaktism is merely the emphasis. While the shaivites lay greater stress on the unmoving, all pervading consciousness of Shiva, the shaktas lay more stress on the dynamic aspect of existence or consciousness called Shakti. Of course, they are really concerned with the same thing, and one can worship both simultaneously. If you prefer to direct your spiritual practices to either one of them, then this automatically implies acceptance and thereby worship of the other. Within the realm of Shiva-Shakti is the entire range of possible human existence. So what is to prevent worship of both?

We can go further: every deity of every religion, all the deities of all tantric sects and in fact any deity that has ever been conceived is no more than one of the multitudinous forms of Shakti (or Shiva). There is nothing in the manifested universe that is not an expression of Shakti. So, in a sense, all religions and sects come under the banner of the shaktas. Of course, the shaktas of India have developed some characteristically far out spiritual practices, but this does not detract from the essential universality of the shaktas. All is Shakti and therefore everything can be regarded and worshipped as Shakti.

We want to end this section by emphasizing that the ancient people of the world were fully aware of the power of spiritual practices orientated towards Shakti. Let us take an example. The ancient Egyptians, like tantrics past and present, knew that the manifested world is the key, the door to the beyond. Instead of calling the power in the world Shakti, they called it Isis. Only the name is different; the basis is the same. It was stated: "I, Isis, am all that has been, all that is and all that shall be; no mortal man (man of low awareness) hath ever unveiled me."

It is only through spiritual practices that Isis, or Shakti, can be unveiled. It is only by raising one's level of awareness that one can pierce the veil (*maya*) that surrounds Isis. Shakti was known by other names in other parts of the world, for the ancient sages knew that she is the means to transcend. She is still the means in the present day.

Saura sect

This sect worships the sun (surya). Though they may appear to worship the physical sun, the real object of worship is that of which the sun is but a symbol: the absolute (Brahman). It is a fitting symbol, for in the same way that the material sun illuminates and sustains the solar system, so the supreme illuminator sustains and is the source of everything seen and unseen, known and unknown. The followers of this sect regard the sun as an emblem of the absolute. Furthermore, the material sun is an indicator of the power of shakti operating throughout the universe, and it is a symbol of the light of consciousness of Shiva.

This sect has its roots in the depths of time, for the sun has always been venerated by people throughout the world. Many people have regarded it as mere nature worship, without really understanding the deeper significance. Yet the sun is an obvious nature created symbol of power. Even those who lacked sophistication and who perhaps lived in primitive conditions could, like everyone else, feel the power of the sun. They could gaze in awe at the rising sun, feel its power and feel a strange stirring within them, a feeling that made them grasp a glimmer of the immense power of the cosmic or spiritual sun shining directly through their inner being. No religious system is really necessary.

The followers of sun worship in India are found mainly in Assam, Orissa and Bengal. In fact, there is a wonderful and world famous temple in Konarak, Orissa which is dedicated to Surya, the sun and all it represents. In certain bygone civilizations, the spiritual sun was also personified: Mithra by the ancient Persians, Apollo by the Greeks, and so on. In fact, it would seem that many religious traditions have worshipped the spiritual sun in a personified form. However, in modern times this has been heavily disguised and people usually fail to realize that a deity or form has its roots in sun worship. Without the material sun, nothing could live. In the same way, nothing could exist without Brahman, the light of consciousness (Shiva) and the power of manifestation and sustenance (Shakti). Worship of the sun is an obvious, yet beautiful way of venerating the transcendental through means of a symbol. This sect has almost faded away as a distinct sect in present day India.

Ganapatya sect

The followers of this sect venerate the chubby elephant deity known as *Ganapati* or *Ganesha*. He is the son of Shiva and Parvati (Shakti) and represents the understanding that comes through the mind. In other words, it is through consciousness and its manifestation (Shiva-Shakti) that one gains mental understanding.

Ganesha is an aspect of the absolute and is widely worshipped throughout India in almost all Hindu rites and ceremonies. The worshippers invoke Lord Ganesha before commencing any important undertaking, for nothing can be achieved without mental understanding. This applies to everyday duties as well as enlightenment. Ganesha is the controller of all accomplishments. Without the grace of understanding, nothing can be achieved. It is for this reason that he is such an important deity, and why a specific sect has arisen around him. Without mental understanding how can anything be initiated or successfully carried out?

Followers of this sect are more prevalent in western India. Huge processions are entirely devoted to the veneration of Ganesha. However, this sect has really ceased to be a distinct tantric group as such and has been absorbed into the mainstream of Hinduism.

Ganesha is traditionally regarded to be the scribe of many of the important scriptures of India, including the tantras. That is, when Shiva, Shakti, Krishna or any other deities, together with rishis, seers, etc. discoursed, Ganesha wrote everything down. He represents the higher understanding that must accompany all scriptures before they can be written, and before they can be used by the reader. In fact, Ganesha is invoked at the beginning of many of the tantric texts; the very first words are: 'Shree Ganeshaya Namaha', which means 'Salutations to the blessed Ganesha'. This is done to encourage correct understanding by both the writer and the reader. There is also a well-known tantric text called the *Ganesha Tantra*.

This system of tantra is simple, direct and yet sublime and it can lead to spiritual heights. It is by invoking and focussing one's powers on mental understanding (personified by Ganesha) that one can actually bring about a high level of understanding in oneself. All that is required is the overwhelming need

to know . . . a need that springs from the very depths of one's heart. This is the same as worshipping Ganesha, providing one understands the significance of Ganesha. From this understanding will come many other things, including illumination and bliss.

Tantric centres

There is a well-known story concerning Shiva and his consort *Sati* (an aspect of Shakti), concerning the origin of the traditional centre of tantra. There are many versions but the following is a brief summary of its main theme. *Sati* was the daughter of Daksha (Prajapati). Much against the wishes of Daksha, who intensely disliked Shiva, *Sati* yearned for and eventually married Shiva. At a later time, Daksha held a vast worship and sacrificial ceremony (*yajna*) to which all the deities were invited, all that is except Shiva and *Sati*. *Sati* came to hear of this through sage Narada, and she was very angry at not being invited. After much pleading she finally persuaded Shiva to allow her to attend. When she reached the ceremony she immediately became involved in an argument with her father regarding the non-invitation of her husband and herself. Her father said that they were not invited because Shiva was so dirty, never wore clothes, was always adorned with a number of snakes and was generally unrepresentable to the other deities. *Sati* became so angry that she jumped into the fire and killed herself. Shiva heard of this, and in a furious mood went to the meeting, caused havoc, disrupted the sacrifice, picked up the remains of *Sati*'s body and flew off into the celestial regions. He caused terrific disturbances among the deities and nothing could be done to calm him down. Eventually, however, Vishnu, flying on his garuda bird, sliced *Sati*'s body into various pieces with a discus, the weapon with which he is associated. The different parts of the body fell in various places throughout the Indian subcontinent. The places where they fell are said to be where tantric centres subsequently grew. Of course the story is very symbolic, but we will not discuss this here.

The tantric centres are known as *pithasthanas* (holy places), which are considered sacred by tantric worshippers and it is said that temples to Shiva and Shakti have been erected there. The number of these holy places is not certain.

Some sources say that there are 4, 50, 51, 64, 108, etc. However, as a matter of interest, it is said that the following places are included in the important holy tantric centres of India: Nasik (Maharashtra), Ujjain (Madhya Pradesh), Brindavan (Uttar Pradesh), Kalighat (Calcutta), Amarnath (Kashmir), Mathila (Bihar), Ratanabali (Madras), Prayag (Allahabad), Puri (Orissa), Benares (Uttar Pradesh), Bahula (Bengal), Kamarupa (Assam), Oddiyana (in the valley of the Swat River – now in West Pakistan) and Jalandhara (between India and Tibet). There are many more; these are merely a few examples. There is much uncertainty and confusion about the actual sites and one will receive various accounts from different people. This shows that the centres are not so important with regard to practice of tantra, and that a person can create a tantric centre in his own home. Though there is some good reason for having sacred centres, the essence of tantra is surely to have one's own sacred shrine and to worship the holy centres in one's own body.

Tantra – the scripture of the Dark Ages

The tantric texts give elaborate descriptions of the different eras of the manifested world. It is said that the universe is manifested for the duration of one day of Brahma, and that it is reabsorbed in an unmanifested form for the duration of one night of Brahma. Brahma is the personified form of the principle of creation. The day of Brahma is called a *kalpa* and is said to last for 4,320,000,000 years. This period is further divided into *mahayugas* (great ages) which periodically repeat themselves over and over again. Each of these *mahayugas* is further divided into four *yugas* (eras):

1. *Satya Yuga*: the Golden Age or the era of truth
2. *Treta Yuga*: the Silver Age
3. *Dwapara Yuga*: the Copper Age
4. *Kali Yuga*: the Iron Age or the Dark Age

According to tantra as well as many other systems throughout the world, we are currently living in the Dark Age (*Kali Yuga*). This age is reputed to have started from 3120 years before the Christian era. This period that we are now living in is said to be an era when harmonious living falls to an all time low, a period when people are almost totally out of balance with themselves and the

environment. You must judge for yourself if this is true or not.

It is said that each of the four ages has its own type of scripture to lead each individual to higher awareness if he has the aspiration. The tantric scriptures are regarded as ideal for the present Kali Yuga. In the *Kularnava Tantra* it states: "In the Satya Yuga the form of scripture is revelation (*shruti*). In the Treta Yuga, memorized scriptures (*smriti*) are to be followed. The scriptures of the Dwapara Yuga are the *puranas* (scriptures in the form of myths), while the *agama* (tantra) is the most suitable for the Kali Yuga."

Actually the scripture of the Satya Age does not lie in any book – it is the direct revelatory experience by the individual. Books would not be necessary whether in the Satya Yuga of the universe or the Satya Yuga of an individual's life – the point in one's life when one begins to tune in with higher spheres is the Satya Yuga for each of us. Under these conditions there is no need for any scriptures, there is no need to rely on other people's words, for one will have direct experience of the meaning of all scriptures for oneself. This is the meaning of *shruti*, the scripture of the age of truth.

In the Treta Yuga, people are said to be less able to comprehend, experience and appreciate the higher realms of knowledge and awareness. For this reason, it is necessary that the experiences of seers be written down as scriptures and remembered. This will act as guidance for any spiritual aspirant and people in general. The scriptures include all the scriptures that have been written down by every religion. In India, these type of scriptures are called *smriti* (remembered knowledge). They are secondhand knowledge as opposed to direct personal spiritual experience. These texts would include the Koran, the Bible, the Upanishads, the Dhammapada and many other traditional texts.

Thus tantra has fully realized that different periods of time require different methods of spiritual instruction and practice to attain enlightenment. Furthermore, the explanations and presentations of specific texts are suitable only for a particular era, after which the texts must be presented in another form. Of course, the final aim of cosmic realization is the same, but the techniques and concepts

must be taught in a way that is acceptable and most easily understood in the prevailing social rules and conditions. Tantra has never said that any of its texts is the final statement on spiritual life. It has always said that the texts are only suitable for a certain time, after which they become redundant. As far as we know, no other spiritual system has ever said this. The tantras realize that the attitudes of man and environmental conditions change with time. Therefore, they realize the obvious: that the instructions and methods in spiritual texts must also change. It is in this way that they will help man not hinder him. The means is different, but the aim is the same.

New tantric texts have arisen throughout the ages and new tantric texts will continue to appear as the present Kali Yuga proceeds. These texts will be recorded as seers have intuitional insights into the changing needs of man.

Unity of Shiva and Shakti

In the following discussion we are specifically talking about the shakta and shaivite sects, with the emphasis on the shaktas.

Shiva represents the unmanifest and Shakti the manifest. Shiva is the formless and Shakti is the formed. Shiva is consciousness and Shakti is energy, not only in the cosmos as a whole, but in each and every individual. Shiva is the supreme consciousness pervading each individual and Shakti is the power that manifests the potential contained within the consciousness in different manifested centres within man and the universe. The roots of Shakti are in Shiva. Though one is manifested and the other unmanifested, they are in the ultimate sense one and the same. One is the principle of changelessness and the other is the principle of change. Shakti is change within changelessness and Shiva is changelessness as the root of change. This relationship seems contradictory in logical terms, yet the experience of perfect oneness and unity of the changeless and the changeable, the dissolution of duality, is the aim of tantra as well as yoga. There is ultimately no difference between Shiva and Shakti, but this is not realizable except in states of higher awareness. And this realization transforms life into a source of wonder and joy.

Everything that you see around you, everything that is physical, psychic, mental

or whatever, is Shakti both individually and collectively. This includes your mind and body. It includes every tree, every dog, every stone, the sun. Shakti is everything. All these manifestations have come from the underlying substratum, Shiva. The aim of tantra is to retread, in a sense, the path of manifestation, so that Shakti is the vehicle to reunite the individual with Shiva and know the supreme experience, samadhi, nirvana or whatever you want to call it. Tantra aims to lead you on the path back to union of Shiva and Shakti, union of the individual being (jiva) with the param-atman (supreme).

Tantra says that Shakti, or the power of creating separate centres of manifestation (i.e. objects, individuals, etc.) is in essence consciousness itself (Shiva). However, the power of the phenomenal world around us veils itself (through maya), and it is not obvious at ordinary states of awareness that it is indeed consciousness. Each and everything in the created universe is no more than manifested consciousness. But strange though it seems, there is no change in the nature or content of the consciousness, even though everything comes from it. In the *Ishavasya Upanishad* it says:

*That is full, this is full.
From full, the full is taken,
the full has come.
If you take out the full from the full,
the full alone remains.*

The great ancient sage of Europe, Plotinus, said exactly the same thing: "The one is every thing and also not every thing. It is not every thing because it is the source of every thing. It is transcendently every thing, because there every thing is . . . , or, more exactly, is not yet but is to be."

These two quotations are the essence of tantra and every religion. Don't worry if you don't understand their meanings, for what they are trying to convey defies intellectual speculation.

Consciousness is an inexhaustible source of everything in the universe, yet ever transcending the things which come out of it. Consciousness never ceases to be what it was, is, and will be. From Shiva comes the universe as a whole and everything individually through the power of Shakti . . . yet Shiva remains ever

the same. At the same time, Shiva and Shakti, in the highest sense, are one and the same. This is the eternal mystery, the eternal wonder, which ever defies description. It is far better to count every stone on the beaches of the world than try to attempt to describe the impossible.

Tantra regards the material universe as the form, pattern, or expression of the totality. According to tantra, both the manifested and unmanifested, the background and the projection, the film and the screen are real. In fact, to tell a person that the things around him are unreal is nonsensical for his personal experience in normal levels of awareness tells him otherwise. Also from the point of view of tantric, yogic or any other spiritual practice, the world must be regarded as real. One must use the body, the mind and other aspects of the world to know that which is beyond. If one regards the mind and body as unreal, as do some systems, then how can one practise spiritual techniques, how can one practise with 'things that are unreal'? Of course, this is a ridiculous point of view in normal levels of experience. Many other systems regard the universe as unreal because it changes. Though it is really no more than a matter of definition, tantra says that everything, whether it changes (Shakti) or is changeless (Shiva) is actually real. Both are no more than two different aspects of the totality.

Shiva is father (*pita*) of all that moves and is motionless. He is said to be naked – clothed in open space (*digambara* – clothed in everything in the universe). Nowadays, he is usually depicted wearing a tiger skin and portrayed as holding a trident which represents the three qualities of nature – *tamas* (inertia and darkness), *rajas* (activity) and *sattwa* (light and harmony) of which he is the eternal master. He is said to ride a bull called Nandi. Shiva contains within himself the seeds of creation. He is symbolized by the shivalingam. He is totally unconditioned, in a continual state of *nirvikalpa samadhi*, with total absence of duality, of this and that. Shiva is the king of all yogis (*Yogeshwara*) for he represents the supreme experience. He is also known as *Kuleshana*, lord of the *kaulas*, those who have reached the highest stage of tantra (*Kaulachara*).

Shiva also means many other things, in different moods or aspects. Don't be confused by these. Sometimes, for example, he is called

Rudra, the destroyer, who seems to be more like Shakti in nature (the dissolving aspect). But the important thing to understand or at least appreciate is that there is really no contradiction between regarding Shiva as the inactive, passive personification of consciousness (as we have already emphasized) and also regarding him as a more active personification in the form of Rudra, the destroyer. This merely further emphasizes that the active and the inactive, the manifest and the unmanifest are really one and the same. All these deities, Shiva, Shakti or whatever, really represent exactly the same thing: the absolute. Only the symbol, the representation is different. And why not? If you wish, you can create your own deity and it will be as valid as any other. This widespread worship of vast numbers of deities indicates the incredible complexity (yet such simplicity when understood) and tolerance of the all embracing spiritual climate of India.

Shakti is known by many names and aspects. She is known as *prana* when associated with the organization and growth of matter in all forms of life. She is known as *kundalini* – the power that lies dormant in everything, including map, and which can be unleashed through yogic and tantric practices, as well as all other spiritual practices. She is known as *Kali*, the dissolver (not the destroyer) of the world, who withdraws everything into her womb at the end of the allotted life span. She is known and depicted in many pictures and statues as *Parvati*, the epitome of the loving, faithful wife of Shiva. She is called the primordial power – *Adya*, the universal mother – *Ishwari*, the consort of *Ishwara*, the lord of the universe. She is also known as *Avidya rupini* (the form of ignorance) for it is she who produces ignorance and individuality. Conversely, she is also known as *Vidya rupini* (the form of knowledge) for she is the means to removing bondage and knowing liberation or enlightenment. As the *Kularnava Tantra* says: “By that which one falls, so one will raise oneself.”

In other words, she is the mind of each of us, which can either enslave us or free us. She is known as *Maya* (the creator of illusion) for it is through her power that one fails to see unity and know higher awareness. At the same time, it is through the power of Shakti that the world is experienced. Without Shakti, you would not be able to experience

the world, for it is she who creates the mind and body. It is through Shakti that Shiva can experience himself. Shakti is also *Parabrahman*, the absolute, when she becomes Brahman at the time when Shiva and Shakti unite. Endless different forms of her are worshipped in India – *Uma*, *Gauri*, *Durga* and so on. Her forms are infinite, for there is no end to her power and the things that she manifests. Her forms are as numerous as the reflections of the moon. She is continually active, creating, sustaining and then reabsorbing or dissolving everything into Shiva, only to be recreated. This is a continual process without end.

Remember, as we have already pointed out, the concept of Shiva and Shakti is not confined to India. We have already said that tantra is universal and indeed it is. For example, in a book of ancient Greece called the *Phaedrus* by Plato it says: “What is on earth (Shakti) is merely the resemblance and shadow of something that is in a higher sphere, a resplendent thing that remains in an unchangeable condition (Shiva).”

This clearly illustrates the principle of Shiva and Shakti. There are many other examples. Consider the ancient *Gnostics*. These were really a European tantric sect, which interpreted Christianity with far deeper meaning than understood by most people. They interpreted it in the light of higher experience. But let us not get distracted; we want to point out the similarities between Shiva and Shakti and this ancient system of gnosis (enlightenment). One of the Gnostic mystics, Simon the Magus, is reputed to have said the following: “The universal eons (cyclic periods of creation as given in tantra) consist of two branches, without beginning or end, which spring up from one root (the absolute) . . . the invisible power and the unknowable silence. One of these branches is manifested from above and is the universal consciousness ordering all things and designated male (surely this is Shiva); the other branch is female and is the producer of all things (Shakti).”

The text continues, but we will not. The Gnostics even divided human beings into three distinct groups, which is exactly the same as tantra. The lowest group, in terms of awareness, are those who worship and only know of the existence of the material world. This group is called *pashu*, or instinctive man in tantra.

The second group include those who worship an underlying reality without experience, but with blind belief. This is similar though not exactly the same as the second classification of tantra, namely *veera*, or heroic man; the third group of humans are those who know and live in higher awareness. In tantra these are known as *divya*, or divine man. So the ancient system of gnosticism is fundamentally tantric in nature. There are many other systems in the world that are very similar. These will not be discussed here through lack of space.

Energy, including matter and consciousness are functioning together in the cosmos as well as in each and every human being. This combination gives rise to the world we see around us; it gives rise to time and place. Energy is controlled by consciousness, and consciousness cannot express itself except through energy. In a tantric book by Shankaracharya called *Saundarya Lahari* it says: "How can Shiva function without Shakti?" Therefore, tantra says that to merge with consciousness one must use Shakti as the means.

There is a supreme experience where Shiva and Shakti no longer exist as separate entities. Some call it Brahman, others call it 'not this, not this' to show that it is inexpressible. Others say that it is one without a second. It is the state of nirvana, samadhi, perfect oneness and so many other words. This is the stage when Shiva merges so closely with Shakti that they become one. They embrace each other so tightly they cease to be separate. This is the meaning of many of the sculptures of personified male and female Shiva and Shakti in India. It depicts the state of being, the enraptured embrace where self-identity and separateness disappears. This is the divine embrace.

Why worship a deity?

In the minds of modern man, worship is often regarded as superstition. Because of misunderstanding, people no longer grasp the meaning and reason for worship, and the purpose of worship is so simple, yet profound. It is to focus one's whole attention on something to the exclusion of all other distractions. This brings about loss of ego and transcendence. By absorbing oneself in an object with total attention it is possible to transcend the limitations of the ego; it is possible to go beyond the normal fetters of human under-

standing and identification. It is possible, through worship, to know the experience of higher consciousness. So remember this point well: worship is a means to an end. Worship of a deity or anything else should not be regarded as an end in itself. This is the mistake that countless people have made. They worship deities without understanding. They worship blindly and dogmatically and don't realize that the worship is a means to something far greater. For this reason, their worship does not take them very far. It may help a little but it will not lead to high levels of awareness.

There is another important point. One can concentrate on a deity or a symbol or anything else without a feeling of devotion. Many people in fact do this and gain wonderful experiences. But at the same time, concentration is far easier, effective and overwhelming if the object of concentration, of absorption, is also an object of devotion or worship. This, in a sense, transforms a 'third rate fuel into a first class, high octane fuel'. Worship or devotion transforms the spiritual practice into a far more powerful form of experience.

Tantra does not aim to make you consider a stone idol as the truth. Tantra regards worship of any relative aspect of existence as the means to break through into the experience of the real, as a means to fuller harmony and knowledge.

Anything that you choose can be regarded as a form of Shakti (or Shiva, as you wish). Of course, this will be a slight divergence from traditional forms of Shakti as known in India. But the scope and benevolence of tantra will allow this extension of its boundaries. Such is its flexibility.

Tantra in the shakta form asks you to regard everything that you see as a form of Shakti. Even though you have had no higher experience one should try to regard them as such. One should try to regard all pleasant and beautiful things as Shakti, as well as things that are normally classified bad such as disease, famine and war. One should try to see a reason or sense or divinity even in things that appear to be destructive. It is the seeming contradiction and unfairness of the world that cause most people to be in a continual state of mental imbalance. They see death and illness and so many other distressing afflictions of the world as being unjust or unwarranted. They

are continually torn between ugliness and beauty. They see strife side by side with peace and this leads to mental confusion. Even on an individual basis, a person is sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy; sometimes up, sometimes down; sometimes healthy, sometimes unhealthy. Tantra says you should try to see all these things as part of the cosmic process of creation, sustenance and dissolution. Regard all the pleasant and unpleasant things in the world as no more than the power and justice of Shakti. Instead of seeing bad in destruction and good in creation regard them all as facets of the power of Shakti. Remember, that for things to be created, they must also be destroyed. For things to be pleasant there must also be unpleasantness. It is not easy to accept these things when they affect a person directly, but one should try more and more to see everything as being no more than change brought about by Shakti. Good and bad are only human concepts. The more one is able to accept the world as it is, without making value judgements, the more calm and contented the mind becomes. One starts to tune in with the environment and to see harmony between processes where before one saw only disharmony. One begins to see unity instead of disunity and becomes receptive to cosmic vibrations and in turn to higher knowledge and bliss.

In the *Mahanirvana Tantra* it says that Brahman, the absolute, is known in samadhi by those people who look upon all things alike, who are above all extremes, such as heat and cold, good and bad, etc. who are devoid of all wandering thoughts and who are free of ignorance and doubts regarding the nature of their body and the Self. It clearly emphasizes that one should try to see harmony in everything in life without exception.

Tantra makes it clear that consciousness, Shiva, can be known through concentration and devotion to the manifestations of the world in the form of Shakti, which are really the embodiment of Shiva. Most people need a form or an object as a point of worship or concentration; and tantra says that this is perfectly acceptable and the way to the experience of the formless, objectless consciousness. Tantra says worship, absorb yourself in any object, Kali, Durga as you wish. There is no Shakti without Shiva and so one automatically leads to the other. This is the

reason for the deification of some aspect of existence, no matter how obscure or unlikely.

According to tantric texts such as the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, even Shakti herself in the form of Parvati was confused about the reason for worship of her many forms. She asked Shiva how worship could lead anyone to the experience of Brahman or the supreme experience. Shiva answered: "You are the supreme manifestation (*para prakriti*) of Brahman, the supreme consciousness (*paramatman*) and from you has come the entire universe. You are its mother. You are the origin of all manifestation. You are the form of everything. Your root is in Brahman who is actionless. It is you, moved by desire, who create, protect and withdraw this world with, all that moves and is motionless. Therefore, by worshipping you your devotees will surely reach the Supreme."

Thus by concentrating on or worshipping any form of Shakti, the individual is in fact worshipping Brahman. This is also widely mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna says: "In whatever way men approach me, so do I reward them. My path men tread in different ways (that is, they choose different methods and objects of worship)." (4:11)

An individual can concentrate on anything from a candle to a deity. If the concentration is sufficiently powerful and constant, then the practice can lead to higher awareness. In the *Agni Purana* it says:

*By the worship of Rudra one becomes Rudra himself.
By the worship of Surya one becomes Surya himself.
By the worship of Vishnu one becomes Vishnu himself.
By the worship of Shakti one becomes Shakti herself.*

In the *Bible* Christ says: "None shall know the kingdom of heaven (Brahman or the supreme experience) but through me." These are not the exact words but the meaning is clear: worship of one thing (in this case Christ) will lead to something beyond. Thus blind worship has come to mean and be understood as blind superstitious faith, but its implications are far deeper and profound and not what most people think it is.

Enjoyment and enlightenment

This is a continuation of what we have just said in the previous section. If everything that

we see around us is no more than Shakti, the manifested form of Shiva, then everything that we see and use in life can be regarded with a feeling of reverence. Every act that we do in life can be transformed into a form of worship by merely regarding it as divinity incarnated. In the broadest sense there is really no exception, and one can feel or express veneration whether eating food or practising yogic techniques. There is ultimately no difference. This is the essence of tantra, especially the shakta form.

Tantra is called *Bhuktimuktikaranika* – the system of enjoyment and enlightenment or liberation through experience. It does not see any rigid demarcation or distinction between worldly or spiritual life. It sees everything as part of everything. In this sense it is different to many other systems, which tend to completely dissociate worldly and spiritual life, often inferring that enjoyment in life is detrimental to progress along the path to higher awareness. Tantra, on the other hand, says that the world is here to be experienced, so experience it, know it, and eventually gain enlightenment. Tantra is possibly the most understanding and least dogmatic system ever devised. It is a system of joy, not a system of sour, dour, narrow and tyrannical restrictions. It is a system of bliss, from top to bottom, from a material and physical sense to a spiritual sense. It aims to give the individual higher awareness here and now in every action.

Pravritti and nivritti paths

Scientifically, evolution is defined as the process where more refined life forms (vehicles of consciousness) grow and develop from the less refined. That is, more advanced life forms arise from lower forms, the gross produces the subtle. This is the theory of scientific evolution. Tantra and Indian thought in general has a completely different concept of evolution. Tantra regards the refinement of life forms (that is, scientific evolution) as merely the pattern of the manifested world. It is the blueprint, the design. It is not the source of life as we know it. The real meaning of evolution, written about by Indian sages thousands of years before Darwin, is the process of Shakti arising or evolving out of Shiva, of the material evolving out of the immaterial. That is, in a deeper sense, each and every life form is not the result of the unfoldment of previous life

forms, every form of life has evolved from the underlying source of existence called consciousness. The subtle does not evolve from the gross (scientific evolution) but the gross evolves out of the subtle (spiritual evolution). Consider a movie film. It has a story that unfolds from the beginning to the end; this can be compared to scientific evolution. Each scene is related to the next but at the same time the story in the film is not the source of the pictures. The source of the picture is elsewhere, namely on the film strip. The film strip can be compared, though grossly, to consciousness. It is a projection of the film on to the screen from the film strip that tantra and other Indian systems regard as evolution, not the flow of the story itself.

This evolution (in the tantric sense) or manifestation of the material world, including life, is in two directions: the outward and the inward. In the outward direction (termed *pravritti*) Shakti plunges downwards and produces the world of forms. In the inward direction (termed *nivritti*) Shakti moves in the opposite direction from the gross to the more subtle. The further Shakti moves outwards and downwards, the deeper is the veil of ignorance. The greater the inward and upward movement of Shakti, the greater the awareness, the knowledge or the grace (*anugraha*) of divinity.

There is an exact parallel concept in Taoism. Shakti is known as Teh which is divided into *yin* (nivritti) and *yang* (pravritti). Yin is the tendency to return to the source, to withdraw and concentrate itself and merge itself with the substratum of consciousness. Yang is expansion, action and creation of all things. These are two rhythms – the yang or action and going forth, of flowering potential; and yin is the retracing, the return to the centre.

The aim of tantric practice is to reverse the downward and outward movement of Shakti and retrace one's steps along the inward and upward path to higher awareness. The aim is to reverse the direction of evolution and return to the source: to reunite Shakti with Shiva.

Tantra divides people into two basic groups:

1. Those who follow the pravritti path, the path of extroversion, the path of the world, of activity and of sensual enjoyment.
2. Those who follow the nivritti path, the path for those who want to return to their source and know their real self.

Most people are ideally suited to the pravritti path. Tantra caters for both groups of people and prescribes special practices for each group. The path to enlightenment is first of all to follow the path of pravritti: to exhaust and fulfil all interest in the things of the world. In this manner one will progress naturally to the nivritti path. No force or effort will be required – it will arise spontaneously. It is the nivritti path that eventually leads to experience of the infinite. But most people are not ready for the nivritti path and must first of all tread the pravritti path and enjoy life in all its facets to the full. The practices of tantra are designed to lead the individual smoothly through both paths to the supreme experience. Tantra recommends those practices that are most suitable for the personality and stage of development of the individual. It realizes clearly that there is no point in forcing the path of introspection ‘down the throats’ of people who are not ready or who are completely disinclined towards it. Such is the depth of understanding and breadth of tantra. Its aim is to lead everyone to enlightenment but in a natural manner that does not build up complexes and do more harm than good.

Ritualistic worship

Much of tantra is concerned with worship in a ritualistic form using incantation (mantras) and magic circles or altars (mandalas). This is not done for superstitious reasons or in a blind manner. There is a very good reason for this form of spiritual practice, namely, eventual transcendence. All religious systems use this method, but generally the aim of ritualistic worship is lost sight of and it degenerates into mere automatic and meaningless actions. Because of this, little or no benefits result and in fact many people eventually come to regard ritual as mere ignorance, which it is indeed in most cases. There must always be a clear understanding of the purpose of ritual, to know that it is a means to go beyond. This is a point that tantra constantly bears in mind.

Modern man tends to scoff at rites and worship as mere superstition, and because there is no basis for worship in modern scientific thought. But there are stranger things in this world than science can even dream about, let alone study. As Shakespeare said: “There are more things in heaven

and earth . . . than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” Tantra also knows this, for it uses systematic ritual with awareness as a means to contact the things that science cannot contact, even with its delicate and complicated instruments. The rites of tantra work, if they are done correctly, and the proof is not in books or theories but in personal experience.

Rites are used for invoking and tuning in with levels of being – psychic, etheric, etc. which are beyond normal perception and the detection of current scientific instruments. Actually this is not quite true, for recent experiments in various countries, including Russia, Bulgaria, etc. are beginning to detect and measure levels of activity and being beyond man’s normal perception. Scientific experiments are clearly showing the reality of human psychic fields, pranic pathways, telepathy, clairvoyance and other so-called ‘unscientific’ phenomena. (For further details refer to *Psychic Discoveries behind the Iron Curtain*). Tantra aims at tuning in with all these different levels of manifestation – this is called *magic* (not magic associated with conjuring tricks on a stage, but contacting and using the cosmic forces within and without). These forces are beyond the range of understanding, perception and knowledge. If you don’t believe in these different levels of being, then don’t . . . find out for yourself through personal experience. One of the methods of contacting these forces is through ceremonial magic or ritualistic worship.

The reader should again remember that magic or rites have been and still are an integral part of all forms of religions and mystical systems throughout the world. The explanation in rational or scientific terms is not important; they bring results and experiences, and if one experiences something then it must be so, no matter what science says. What does one believe: one’s own experience or a scientific statement that says it cannot be so? You can choose as you wish, but we prefer personal experience as being the most important.

Rites are concerned with worship, set actions, mantras, mudras and other actions. These make the mind calm, receptive and one-pointed. This is conducive to the experience of meditation, which will transform one’s understanding and relationship with life, oneself and other people. Thus we repeat again that rituals are the means to something else.

The object of worship is usually a deity. This represents the whole purpose of the practice. It is a symbol of that which is to be invoked. In a sense, it is the power incarnated. This symbol represents Shakti, the power of a particular aspect of existence. This Shakti is to be invoked by feeling or devotion (bhava), concentration (dharana), incantations (mantras), symbolic gestures (mudras) as well as other practices. This brings about a change in one's being. One becomes receptive to that power symbolized by the deity. This is difficult for most people to appreciate without experience, so we will illustrate with an analogy. Consider a string of a musical instrument. When it is plucked it can bring about a change in one's feeling or being. A symbol of Shakti can do the same thing, but it does not merely bring about a change in one's feelings . . . it also brings about a change in one's level of awareness. This is not a very good example, for the experience we are trying to explain is far greater than any analogy.

Tantra aims to transform every action in life into a ritual, so that the individual performs every action and thought with a feeling of worship and awareness. The action of bathing, dressing, sitting for worship, offering various symbolic sacrifices, sexual relations, stages of development from inception in the womb, birth to marriage, etc. are transformed into worship.

The aim of tantra is to unleash the cosmic energy in man, so that he rises to higher levels of awareness. This is often done by self-identification with a particular devata, which represents or personifies a particular cosmic force. Such is the power of mental concentration. Perfect one-pointedness and merging of one's entire mind flow towards the devata leads to transcendence, something that is totally beyond the devata itself.

Tantra is a system which tries to make the individual more aware of every action and every thought. Every ritual requires attention, whether it is a set ceremonial ritual of worship, or an everyday chore or duty. Each ritual has to be done with attention. They cannot be done mechanically or unconsciously. They have to be done with awareness, which eventually leads to meditation. Tantra worship is not confined to the temple. It is done from the moment one gets out of bed in the morning to the moment

one returns to bed in the night. Its purpose is to intensify awareness. It leads the aspirant to a continuous stream of meditation throughout the day.

The mandala and yantra

A *mandala* is a magic circle, in which one performs tantric rites. It is a focus of cosmic powers. During worship and other tantric practices a mandala becomes the centre of the universe in a symbolic sense and in a far deeper sense beyond normal comprehension. A tantric mandala is usually laid out according to a fixed plan; in fact the making of the mandala is a tantric rite in itself.

As we have already pointed out under the heading entitled 'Tantra – The Universal System', everything in the manifested world is in essence a mandala. Each and every object is a focal point of consciousness. There is not one thing that is not a mandala. Everything is a point of manifestation of Shakti . . . an expression of the underlying consciousness. It is for this reason that deep concentration on anything, and we mean anything, can bring about higher awareness and realization of the deeper nature of that object. But almost every person lacks sufficient power of concentration to do this. Instead, the power of the mind is dissipated in all directions. But the power is there to be used when the individual is ready; it only needs to be tapped. It is for this reason that devotion is an important, though not indispensable, part of tantric meditative practices. It increases, supercharges the power of concentration. Concentration becomes far more powerful and piercing when it is backed up by emotional feeling or reverence.

Each person is a mandala, each thought is a mandala, each deity, each chakra . . . each and everything. The guru too is a mandala – a very powerful one in fact. This may be a little far away from the normally accepted meaning of the word mandala, but as far as we are concerned the guru is indeed a mandala. He in a sense, draws down cosmic consciousness, acting as a magnet through which this consciousness expresses itself most obviously and clearly. He radiates the inner light of consciousness to everyone . . . he glows with it. It is through the guru that cosmic powers are unleashed, attracted and transmitted to the disciple. This is the grace of the guru mandala.

Sexual union is also a powerful mandala. That is why it can be a means to meditation. When a man and a woman make love, then they are creating a magic circle, a mandala.

The definitions that we have given are wide. For the sake of tradition and simplicity, we will define a mandala more specifically as a centre or special place, possibly consecrated by special rites, which is used for tantric practices. This means, when you are doing your yoga practices, you are really creating a mandala, a magic circle. You are creating a centre and trying to tune in with, invoke and harmonize with higher consciousness. Do you realize this? You are really performing a rite when you do asanas, pranayama and other practices. Of course, there is probably no worship involved as such, but it is nevertheless a form of rite. Remember this point if you have a tendency to scoff at rituals.

What is a yantra? A yantra is a specific form of mandala, which consists of geometrical shapes and figures, and sometimes diagrams of deities (especially in the Buddhist tantra system). This is also a deified form of an aspect of existence, though it is less obvious. A yantra is a particularly powerful form of mandala and deep concentration on it can lead to higher realization of its nature.

The Sanskrit word *yantra* is such a descriptive word and is perfectly apt for the name of this form of mandala. According to the dictionary, it means an instrument, a machine, an apparatus, an implement. And this exactly sums up the mystical diagram in all ways. It is indeed an implement, a machine (though not an electrical or mechanical one) because it acts as an instrument for tuning in with consciousness. It is indeed a machine – a machine to induce states of meditation. It is a spiritual machine.

One yantra we have given at the end of this topic is called *shree yantra*. It is the most well known of all yantras and is a particularly powerful tool for inducing meditation. It acts as a powerful point of focus for spiritual aspirants. If your concentration is intense enough, then it can bring higher realization. At first it is a mere geometrical configuration, but by deep concentration and reflection one is sucked through the centre, so to say. One realizes the nature of the yantra, and simultaneously the nature of the sadhaka himself.

All you have to do is to concentrate on the yantra and plunge through the middle.

Mandalas and yantras are an indispensable part of tantra; without them tantra would not be tantra. Without them tantra would fail to give the result that it does. We are not asking you to believe in the power of mandalas and yantras, but at least keep an open mind and in the future practise for yourself, so that you can know from your own experiences.

Mantras

Mantras on a gross level are special sound patterns. On a deeper level they are much more. Together with mandalas and yantras, mantras are the most important aspects of tantra. They are the essence of practical tantra. Almost invariably, mantras and mandalas or yantras are used in conjunction with each other to form powerful combinations. A mandala, yantra or devata is the form of consciousness, while the mantra is the vehicle of consciousness. The mandala, yantra or devata is the manifested form, configuration of Shakti, while the mantra, which is also Shakti, is the link between consciousness and form. This applies to everything in the world around us. The visible form is the expression while the mantra is the vehicle of expression. The mantra is the direct link with the beyond. The world we know is materialized and shaped through mantras, through sound at all levels and degrees of subtlety, generally way beyond one's usual perception of sound. The mantras originate in the consciousness substratum of Shiva. And there is absolutely no reason why mantras cannot be used to retrace the direction of manifestation so that one again merges with consciousness. A train that goes from here to Delhi can also be used to return. A mantra is therefore a means to make a U-turn and retrace one's footsteps, one's path back to the source. A mantra can and does transport one from low levels of awareness to higher levels.

Most people are unfamiliar with the science of mantras. Conversely, if a person is familiar with mantras they usually lack personal experience, or even worse, they associate mantras with sorcery and witchcraft. People often have concepts and visions of witches chanting incantations and making spells while stirring some evil brew in a big round pot, intent on some mischief, perhaps with the

broomstick ready so that they can quickly fly off into the nether worlds. Such is the non-sense, superstition and misunderstanding that surrounds the use of mantras. And this is a great pity for they can help to transform one's life. Like mandalas, mantras imply far more than is understood on first impression. They can bring about experiences that cannot even be talked about. They are often described as specific sound structures, but there is far more inherent in mantras for they extend their influence into the realms of the subtle. In a sense, their roots are in the subtle and their branches are in the more gross levels of existence. It is only at low levels of awareness that they are seen and understood as mere sound patterns. They are far, far more.

Actually, the use of mantra is a science, a very wonderful science. In the past this science was widely practised in all parts of the world. In recent years it has been sadly neglected as people become more and more attached to gross and materialistic explanations of phenomena. But the science of mantras is being revived and will bring vast repercussions in the world of the future. This must happen, for it is the power of mantras that can unlock the secrets of nature and the universe. Mantras will be used as a scientific tool, in the same way that light and lasers, and electron microscopes are currently used to peer into the deeper realms of nature.

The inner being of every individual is in continual contact with something much greater than the limitations of individuality. Most people are never aware of this; it is beyond normal levels of awareness. Mantras bring about a state of 'resonance' between the individual and the depths of the inner being. Psychologists would say that the individual tunes in with his collective unconscious. Mantras are the means to harmonize with these inner cosmic forces. Specific mantras are used to contact particular realms of the inner being.

Again don't make the mistake of thinking that this power of mantras is confined to tantra, for it definitely is not. It is an integral part of many eastern systems, including Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, etc. It is also a part of systems throughout the world, including western systems, though it is usually hidden in esoteric language and symbols.

Magic

Magic occurs in the realm of the material universe (maya). Everything that happens around us in the world, whether the birth of a child, the growth of a tree, a flying bird or the digestive process, it is really magic. What can be more magical than the incredible phenomena occurring around us every second of the day? All that magic rites involve is the manipulation of the universal magic around and within us. Modern science, in a sense, does this through various energy manipulations: electrical, mechanical, biological and so forth. The tantric, yogi or magician invokes cosmic forces, psychic forces, etc. by means of mantras, mandalas, rites and other tantric practices. If you don't think this is possible, then we don't intend to persuade you otherwise. In fact, we again point out that there is no reason why you should believe anything without personal experience. Only keep an open mind to possibilities, and remember that magic rites have been practised throughout the history of mankind.

The basic premise of magic is that the macrocosm is reflected in the microcosm, though in fact the relationship is far deeper than this. Therefore, change in the outer world, in the phenomenal universe and in the individual himself can be invoked by magical means. The microcosm is the gateway to the macrocosm. Undertaking of the inner leads to understanding of the outer. Understanding of maya leads to its mastery.

In tantra, magic is to be used to bring about positive changes in one's being and surroundings. Unfortunately, magic is easily open to abuse in the form of black magic. This leads to a person's downfall, for negative actions lead to negative repercussions on the magician. There is a tendency for the misapplied use of magic to rebound. Tantra, of course, discourages misuse of magic. It advocates that magic should be used to bring about harmony; it should be in accordance with one's nature (dharma). This is often called white magic. But magic is magic; it is only misappropriate or appropriate use that transforms it into black or white magic. The power is there in each individual; it is the way that it is used that is important. If it is used properly then it can lead to extraordinary experiences, higher awareness and knowledge. If used wrongly, for

personal gain or for purposes of revenge, then the practitioner will suffer.

Most people are either very sceptical about magic, or they regard it as supernatural. But actually it is no more than an extension of one's natural faculties beyond the range that most people comprehend and experience. Magical power is real . . . as real as anything else that exists. But it is beyond the normal experience. The power of magic stems from the dictum of the *Vishvasara Tantra* which says:

*What is here is elsewhere;
What is not here is nowhere.*

It stems from the dictum of Hermes Trismegistus of ancient Egypt, who said: "What is below is an image of that which is above; And that which is above is an image of that which is below for the purposes of magic or miracle."

All tantric and yogic practices are a form of magic invocation, for they are trying to tune you in with something else, whether it is inner peace, knowledge or whatever. And the greatest form of magic is nirvana, samadhi, kaivalya or whatever you want to call the state of enlightenment.

Christ was a magician, for he performed miracles. Buddha was a magician, Mohammed was a magician, Moses was a magician, together with an innumerable number of yogis and saints throughout the ages. A guru is a magician, let there be no doubt about this. And so on. Magic merely covers the aspects of existence which are beyond normal low states of awareness. It is magic brought about by spiritual practices that will take you to indescribable states of consciousness, knowledge and bliss.

Magic is the process of spiritual alchemy, for it fuses the individual consciousness with the supreme consciousness. It transmutes the mortal into the immortal. Man finds his real nature. It is by looking inside that one discovers the secrets of the universe and the supreme secret. This is magic.

The guru

We don't want to go into the details of the guru-disciple relationship here; all we want to do is to point out the role of the guru in tantra¹. It is the guru who pushes and inspires his disciples to higher levels of awareness. In

the higher stages of tantra, he is indispensable. He is the very essence around which everything else revolves. He is the sun from which all the planets in the form of disciples draw their energy and aspiration.

When tantra was widely practised in India (and other parts of the world) it seems certain that each tantric community had a spiritual centre, a focal point, a pivot . . . a guru. Without a guru, tantra in the higher stages cannot be practised. This does not mean that you cannot practise tantric techniques without a guru, for it is possible in the early stages. This is the reason why we are starting to introduce you to tantra; if you needed a guru to practise then there would be no point in publishing details. But at a certain stage one needs a guru. There comes a point in a person's life when he is ready to surrender himself to a guru. And when you are ready, when you reach a certain level of awareness, then your guru will find you. You will not find him, he will find you. Then he will initiate you into the higher stages of tantra. You will not meet your guru, whoever he is, until you are ready, until you have reached a certain point. Perhaps you will not even be looking for a guru, perhaps not even know the meaning of the word guru, but at a certain stage your guru will appear. That is the starting point of higher tantra; even if you have not practised tantra before.

Until you are ready, until you meet your guru, then you must practise yoga and tantra and wait for the guru to appear and lead you up the ascending stairway to higher awareness.

The guru, the right guru for you, is so important. Many people listen to other people in order to know the path, but often the instructor is at the same level of awareness as the student and under these circumstances, little or nothing is gained. It is a case of the blind leading the blind or as it is so succinctly put in the *Bible*: "If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (*Matthew 15:14*)

It is only a person who is at a higher state of awareness who can successfully guide the disciple along the narrow path, often described as the razor's edge. A guru is a guru because he is at a higher level of awareness and as such can clearly see the disciple's pitfalls and blocks. Because of this higher awareness he can take steps to remove these mental obstacles.

Tantra and yoga

How is tantra related to yoga? Yoga is well known, yet tantra is surrounded and veiled in an aura of superstition and mystery. This in a way is very strange, for in fact yoga and tantra are in essence the same system. They are intimately related. To be more specific: yoga is a part of the more encompassing, wider system of tantra. All practices such as asanas, pranayama, all yogic paths such as karma yoga, bhakti yoga, kundalini yoga, hatha yoga, mantra yoga, kriya yoga and so on, are all an integral part of tantra. All the practices that you know as yoga are also part of tantra. You have already been practising tantra and you have not known it!

Some people say that the science of yoga originated from Samkhya philosophy, but this is not really true. Yoga as it is widely known and practised, the yoga that has been practised in India for thousands of years, comes directly from tantra. Even Samkhya, which is a wonderful system of classifying the material world as a means to enlightenment (a way of jnana yoga to be more specific) is an integral part of certain sections of tantra, namely Kashmir Shaivism. In a wider sense, yoga has its roots in all religious systems, whether the path of the Vedas, Christianity, Buddhism or whatever. Yoga is an integral part of all religions. But the classified system of yoga as you know it, the form of yoga that originated, developed and flourished in the rich environment of India, comes almost completely from tantra. All the practices in this book are basically tantric.

To sum up: tantra covers a vast range of interests, from rituals to rules of regulating one's life, from astrology to ayurvedic medicine. Yoga on the other hand is more specific; it is in general concerned with directly influencing the mind and body as a method of attaining good health, mental peace and eventually higher awareness. Tantra has the same aim, but it includes within its fold a greater range of methods and interests. We can say: tantra is the mother and yoga is the son.

Suitability for the present age

Tantra has grown naturally throughout the past eons. It has never really been rigidly defined as a whole, which actually is a point in its favour, for it allows tantra to adapt to

the continually changing conditions and not become frozen with fixed dogmas.

Actually, as we have already pointed out, tantra is probably the only system that fully realizes that its written texts become semi-redundant in the course of time. People's tastes and attitudes, social rules and conditions change and so forth. Each society has specific characteristics with which the individual has to come to terms on the path of physical and mental well being and higher awareness. It is for this reason that tantric tradition says that new tantric texts will be revealed and recorded. These will automatically replace archaic texts that have lost their relevance. This is not merely an idea, for it has actually occurred; most of the age-old traditional tantric texts are no longer available; they have either been lost, hidden or destroyed. Most of the tantric texts that are now in circulation are comparatively new. That is, they have been written during the last few hundred years. The old texts seem to have faded away according to the edicts and predictions of tantric traditions.

One might wonder why tantra, being such a fundamental and life-enriching system, is not now widely practised in India. Actually tantra is still practised, but it is disguised and has been absorbed into Hinduism, the compendium of religions which has tended to absorb everything into its bosom. Its significance however has been widely forgotten, or even worse, it has been extensively misunderstood and abused. For this reason, tantra has tended to be regarded with some contempt; it is associated with mad sorcerers and so many malpractices. But this reputation is harsh, to say the least, and is generally unfounded. The reason for this reputation is complex, but one of the main reasons is that many of the tantric texts are written in the so-called meaningful 'twilight language'. That is, the practices of tantra are explained in symbolic terms, which can only be understood with personal guidance from a guru. This was done to protect the contents of the tantric texts from misinterpretation, misuse and abuse. This ruse or device did network, however, and tantra was misapplied and misconstrued on a wide scale. You must remember that some of the tantric rituals are very technical and complex. It is therefore so easy to misinterpret them without the guidance of a competent teacher.

And it came to pass

Tantra encompasses all aspects of life. Its philosophical basis reaches the loftiest heights of comprehension, yet at the same time is amenable to practical application. It has different levels of meaning and significance which only unfold themselves gradually through personal experience.

Modern man is looking for something, but does not know what it is. We feel that tantra, including yoga, is the answer that you are looking for. It is based on the wisdom and experiences of thousands of tuned in enlightened sages, throughout the ages. It is tested by time.

Without joy and experience of higher awareness, life is dull, frustrating and often purposeless. Even one small glimpse of a transcendental experience will inject new aspiration, new joy into even the most unemotional person. Tantra promises just this: higher awareness, happiness and knowledge. Tantra is a method of instructing and leading you to material and spiritual fulfilment. Cosmic awareness can come through participation in the world; it is not necessary to reject life and become an ascetic. This is the way of tantra.

Tantra is a system for those people who are not ascetically inclined and who are intimately involved in the activities of the world. It is therefore most suitable for modern man. It is a means for removing inhibitions and complexes. Tantra says that life should be an expression of joy, though the acts of joy should of course be dharmic (harmonious) and not adharmic (disharmonious). Tantra takes the individual by the hand and slowly leads him towards higher awareness. Tantra says: "Why suffer guilt about actions and thoughts; every act should be a form of worship, for everything is Shakti . . . which is Shiva."

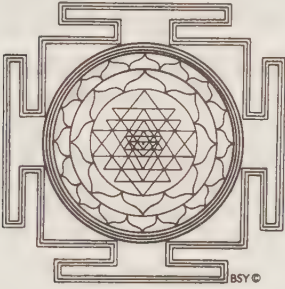
Notes

¹ Guru – The guiding light: Book I, Lesson 10,
Topic 1

Tantra: Yantras

Hereunder we give you some of the best known and powerful tantric yantras, the mystic diagrams which, when properly concentrated and meditated upon, or *trataka* practised thereon, bestow both *bhukti* and *mukti* (enjoyment and liberation). We have given the name of the yantra, its mantra, and its presiding deity. Mantra, yantra and devata are the essence of tantra yoga.

SRI YANTRA



Sri Tripura Sundari Dhyānam

बालावर्कमण्डलाभासां चतुर्बाहान्त्रिलोचनाम् ।
पाशांकुशशरांश्चापन्धारयन्ती शिवाम्भजे ।

Bālārkkarmandalābhasām chaturbbāhān-
trilochanām.
Pāshāṅkushasharānshchāpandhārayantim
Shivāmbhaje.

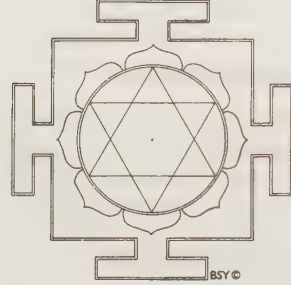
She radiates like the aura surrounding the rising sun. She has three eyes and four hands. She holds the pasha (noose of bondage), ankusha (hook), bow and arrow. I meditate on you who is the form of Shiva.

Mantra

ह्रीं कएईल ह्रीं हसकहल ह्रीं सकल ह्रीं

Hrīm Kaeīla Hrīm Hasa Kahala Hrīm Sakala Hrīm

SHIVA YANTRA



Shiva Dhyānam

ध्यायेन्नित्यमहेशंरजतगिरिनिभञ्चारुचन्द्रावतंसं
रत्नाकल्पोज्ज्वलाङ्गम्परशुमृगवराभीतिहस्तम्प्रसन्नम् ॥
पद्मासीनंसमन्तात्स्तुतममरणैव्यभिक्तृत्तिवसानं
विश्वाद्यंविश्वबीजत्रिखिल भयहरम्पञ्चवक्त्रत्रिनेत्रम् ॥ १ ॥

Dhyāyennityammaheshamrajatagirinibhanchāru-
chandrāvatansam
Ratnākalpojjvalāṅgamparashumrigavarābhitihas-
tamprasannam.
Padmāsinamsamantātstutamamaraganairvyāghra-
krittimvasānam
Vishvādyam vishvabijannikhila bhayaharam-
panchavaktrarinetram.

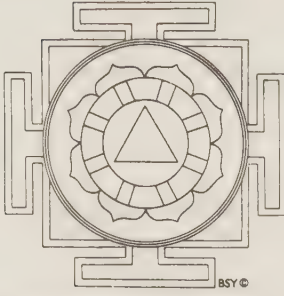
He is beyond the seed of creation. He dispels fear of the universe. He has five heads, each of which has three eyes. He sits in padmasana (the lotus pose) on a tiger skin. All the gods pray to him who performs the vara mudra (dispelling of fear) and abhaya mudra (granting of boons). In his other hands he holds an axe and a deer. He is always cheerful and graceful. I meditate on the form of Shiva, whose body is like the silver mountain and on whose head is the crescent moon.

Mantra

ॐ नमः शिवाय

Om Namaḥ Shivāya

YANTRA RAJ



Dakshina Kālikā Dhyānam

मेघांगीं शशिशेखरां त्रिनयनां रक्ताम्बरां विभ्रतीम् ।
पाणिभ्यामभयं वरञ्च विलसद्भारविन्दस्थिताम् ॥
नृत्यन्तं पुरतो निपीय मधुरं माध्वीकमद्यं महाकालम् ।
वीक्ष्य विकसिताननवामाद्यां भजे कालिकाम् ॥

Meghāngim shashishekharaṁ trinayanāṁ
raktāmbarāṁ vibhratim.
Pānibhyāmbahayam varancha vilasadrāravinda
sthitām.

Nrityantam purato nipiya madhuram
mādhvikamadyam mahākalam.

Vikshya vikasitānānavarāmādyam bhaje kālikām.

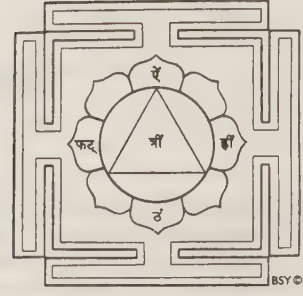
I meditate on that form who is seated in the fully blossomed red lotus, with red garments, whose complexion is dark, who has three eyes and the crescent moon shining in the forehead, who enjoys the play of mahakala intoxicated with madhvika madya, who is the bestower of boons and dispeller of fears; to Kalika I offer my salutation.

Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं श्रीं क्रीं परमेश्वरी दक्षिण
कालिके ह्रीं श्रीं क्रीं स्वाहा

Om Hṛīm Śhṛīm Kṛīm Parameshvarī Dakshina
Kālike Hṛīm Śhṛīm Kṛīm Svāhā

TARA YANTRA



Tara Dhyānam

प्रत्यालीढपादार्पिताङ्घ्रिशवहृत्थोराट्टहासापरा ।
खंगेन्दीवरकर्त्रिखर्परभुजाहुंकारबीजोद्भवा ॥
खर्व्वा नीलविशालपिंगलजटाजूटैकनागैर्युता ।
जाड्ययन्त्रस्यकपालकर्तृ जगता हन्त्युग्रतारास्वयम् ॥

Pratyāliḍhapādārpitāṅghrishavahritghorāṭṭhāsāparā.
Khangendivarakartrikharpparabhujāhūmkārabijod-
bhavā.

Kharvā nilavishālapingalajatājūṭaikanāgairyyutā.
Jādyannyasyakapālakartrijagatam hantyuḡratā-
rāsvayam.

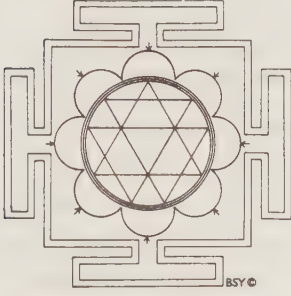
She places both feet on the heart of a corpse, in pratyalidha (as if about to shoot an arrow). She laughs with the frightful laugh of a horse. She who manifests from the humkar (bija mantra) holds a sword, a small sword, a blue lotus and a bowl. She is small in stature and blue in complexion, having voluminous matted and braided hair decorated with snakes. She is called Ugratara (the fierce one) who is able to stir the world in its three spheres into activity. She preserves and destroys.

Mantra

ऐं ओं ह्रीं क्रीं हूँ फट्

Aim Om Hṛīm Kṛīm Hūm Phaṭ

DURGA YANTRA



Durga Dhyānam

सिंहस्कंधसमारूढात्रानालंकारभूषिताम् ।
चतुर्भुजाम्महादेवीत्रागयज्ञोपवीतिनीम् ॥ 1 ॥
रक्तवस्त्रपरीधानाम्बालार्कसदृशीतनुम् ॥
नारदाद्यैर्मुनिगणैःसेविताम्भवगेहिनीम् ॥ 2 ॥
त्रिवलीवलयोपेतनाभिनालसुवेशिनीम् ॥
रत्नद्वीपेमहाद्वीपेसिंहासनसमन्विते ॥
प्रफुल्लकमलारूढान्ध्यायेताम्भवगेहिनीम् ॥

Simhaskandhasamārūdhānnānālankārabhūshitām.
Chaturbhujām mahādevī nāgayajnopavitinim.
Raktavastra paridhānam bālārkkasadrishitanum.
Nārādādyairmuniganaih sevitam bhavagehinim.
Trivalivalayopetanābhinālasuveshinim.
Ratnadvipemahādvipe simhāsanasamanvite.
Prafullakamalārūdhān dhyāyettāmbhavagehinim.

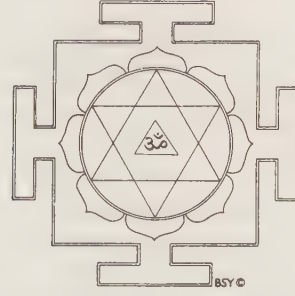
She is decorated with various kinds of ornaments and is riding a lion. She wears a serpent as the sacred thread. She has four hands and wears blood-coloured garments. Her body radiates like the rising sun. Munis like Narada always show devotion: "Oh Bhavagehini, whose navel is a beautiful junction having three parallel lines in the great island of jewels, sitting on the throne of a lotus blossom, I meditate on Thee who is the root of the world."

Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं दुंदुर्गायै नमः

Om Hrīm Duṃdurgāyai Namaḥ

BAGALAMUKHI YANTRA



Bagalā Dhyānam

मध्येसुधाब्धिमणिमण्डपरत्नवेदीसिंहासनो -
परिगताम्परिपीतवर्णाम् ॥
पीताम्बराभरणमाल्यविभूषितांगीन्देवीत्रमामि -
धृतमुद्गरवैरिजिह्वाम् ॥ 1 ॥
जिह्वाग्रमादायकरेण देवी वामेनशत्रून्परिपीडयन्तीम् ॥
गदाभिघातेन च दक्षिणेनपीताम्बराढ्यां द्विभुजान्नमामि ॥ 2 ॥

Madhyesudhābhdhimanimandaparatnavedi
simhāsanoparigatāmparipitavarṇnām.
Pitāambarābharanamālyavibhūshitāngin
devinnāmāmidhrita mudgaravairijihvām.
Jihvāgramādayakarena devim vāmenashatrūn
paripidayantim.
Gadābhigātena cha dakshinena
pitāambarādhyām dvibhujānnamāmi.

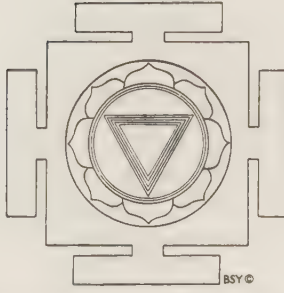
She wears yellow coloured garments, a garland, and various types of ornaments. She is sitting on a throne on an altar of precious jewels surrounded by the ocean of nectar; on that Devi I meditate. She holds a club (mudgara) and is pulling the tongue of the enemy. I prostrate myself before her who firmly holds the tongue of the enemy with her left hand and strikes him with that club.

Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं बगलामुखिसर्वदुष्टानांवाचम्मुखंस्तम्भयजिह्वां-
कीलयकीलयबुद्धिनाशाय ह्रीं ॐ स्वाहा ।

Om Hrīm Bagalāmukhī Sarvavadustānām
Vācham Mukham Stambhaya Jihvam Kīlaya
Kīlaya Buddhin Nāshaya Hrīm Om Svāhā

KALI YANTRA



Kālī Dhyānam

शिवारूढाम्महाभीमांघोरदंष्ट्रां हसन्मुखीम् ।
चतुर्भुजांखगमुण्डवराभयकरां शिवाम् ॥
मुण्डमालाधरान्देवीं ललज्जिह्वान्दिगम्बराम् ।
एवं सञ्चिन्तयेत्कालीं श्मशानालयवासिनीम् ॥

Shavārūdhām mahābhimām ghoradanstrām
hasanmukhim.
Chaturbhujāmkhangamundavarābhayakarām
Shivām.
Mundamālādhārāndevīm lalajjihvāndigambarām.
Evam sanchintayetkālīmshma shānālaya vāsinīm.

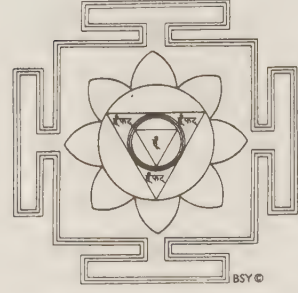
Standing on a corpse, the great and fearful Kali has grotesque teeth. She is laughing wildly. In two hands she holds a sword and a head; with her other two hands she shows the vara mudra (for granting boons) and the abhaya mudra (for dispelling fear). She wears a garland made of heads; her tongue is outstretched and her body naked. Kali lives in the cremation ground. I concentrate on her form.

Mantra

क्र्रीं क्र्रीं क्र्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं ह्रूं दक्षिणे कालिके
क्र्रीं क्र्रीं क्र्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं ह्रूं स्वाहा ।

Krīm Krīm Krīm Hrīm Hrīm Hūm Hūm
Dakshīne Kālīke Krīm Krīm Krīm Hrīm Hrīm
Hūm Hūm Svāhā

CHHINNAMASTA YANTRA



Chhinnamastā Dhyānam

प्रत्यालीढपदांसदैवदधतीञ्छिन्नंशिरुंकार्रिकान्दिग्वस्त्रांस्व-
कबन्धशोणितसुधाधाराभिवन्तीमुद्रा ॥
नागाबद्धशिरोमणिन्नयनांतृधुत्पलालंकृतां रत्यासक्तमनोभवो
परिदृढान्त्यायेज्जवासन्निभाम् ॥

दक्षे चातिसिताविमुक्तचिकुराकर्त्रीन्तथाखप्परं
हस्ताभ्यान्दधतीरजोगुणभवा नाम्नापिसावर्णिनी ॥
देव्याश्छिन्नकबन्धत्पतदसूग्धाराभिवन्तीमुद्रा
नागाबद्धशिरोणिर्मनुविदाध्ययासदासासुरैः ॥
प्रत्यालीढपदाकबन्धविगलद्रक्तम्पिवन्ती मुद्रा
सैषायाप्रलयेसमस्तभुवनम्भोत्कुंक्षमातामसी ॥
शक्तिःसापिपरात्पराभगवती नाम्नापराडाकिनी
ध्येया ध्यानपरैः सदा सविनयं भक्तेष्ट भूतिप्रदा ॥

Pratyālīdhapadānsadaivadadhatichhinnamshiram
kartrikāndigvastrāmsva kabandhashonitasudhā-
dhārām pivantimmūdā.
Nāgābaddhashiromaninrinayanamtridyyutpalālam-
kritām ratyāsaktamanobhavo
paridridhāndhyāyējjavāsannibhām.
Dakshe chātisitāvimuktachikurākārtrinta-
thākhapparam
hastābhyāndadhatirajogunbhavā
nāmnāpisāvarnini.
Devyāshchhinnakabandhatampatadasrigdhārām-
pibantimmūdā
Nāgābaddhashiromanirmanu-
vidādhyyeāsadāsāsuraiḥ.
Pratyālīdhapadākabandhavigaladraktampivantimmūdā
saishāyāpralayasamastabhuvanambhoktum
kshamātāmasi.
Shaktisāpiparātparābhagavati nāmnāparādākini
dhyeyā
Dhyānaparaiḥ sadā savinayam bhakteshta-
bhutiprada.

She stands in pratyalidha and holds her own disembodied head and gladly drinks her own blood as it streams from her neck. Her clothes

are the four directions. She has three eyes and wears the serpent on her forehead. She is in the position of the union of Rati and Kama. I meditate on that form which radiates like a red flower (Java). On her right side the nayika holds a small sword and a bowl. She is Varnini by name and is produced out of rajoguna. She joyfully drinks the blood streaming from the chopped head of the Devi. On her left side is the nayika Dakini who also stands in the position of pratyaliḍha, and drinks the blood streaming from the Devi. She can digest all the worlds at the time of dissolution.

Mantra

श्रीं ह्रीं क्लीं ऐं वज्रवैरोचनीये हूं हूं फट् स्वाहा

Shrīm Hrīm Klīm Aiṃ Vajravairochaniye Hūṃ Hūṃ Phaṭ Svāhā

Vishnu Dhyānam

शान्ताकारम्भुजगशयनम्यन्ननाभं सुरेशं ।
विश्वाधारंगगनसदृशस्मेधवर्णं शुभांगम् ।
लक्ष्मीकान्तम्कमलनयनमयोगिभिर्ध्यानगम्यं
वन्देविष्णुम्भवभयहरंसर्वलोकैकनाथम् ॥

Shāntākārambhujagashayanampadmanābham
Suresham Vishvādhāramgaganasadrisham-
meghavarnnam shubhāngam.
Lakshmikāntam kamalanayanam yogibird-
dhyānagamyam
Vandevishnumbhavabhayaharam
sarvalokaika- nātham.

He is calm and sleeps on the snake Ananta from whose navel there rises a lotus. This is the God of gods, the support of the universe, who is like an infinite sky. He has a beautiful physique and is the husband of Lakshmi. His eyes are like full-grown lotuses. I meditate on Vishnu who is the remover of all fear in this universe.

Mantra

ॐ नमो नारायणाय

Om Namō Nārāyaṇāya

Note: For this dhyānam use the Shiva Yantra.

Dhumāvati Dhyānam

विवर्णाचञ्चलादुष्टादीर्घाचमलिनाम्बरा ॥
विमुक्तकुन्तलारूक्षाविधवाविरलद्विजा ॥
काकध्वजरथारूढाविलम्बितपयोधरा ॥
शूर्पहस्तातिरूक्षाक्षधूतहस्तावरान्विता ॥
प्रवृद्धधोणानुभृशंकुटिलाकुटिलेक्षणा ॥
क्षुत्पिपासातिनित्यम्भयदाकलहास्पदा ॥

Vivarnnāchanchalāduṣṭādīrghāchamalināambarā.
Vimuktakuntalārūkshāvidhavāviraladvijā.
Kākadhvajarathārudhāvilambitapayodharā.
Shūrppahastātīrūkshākshādhutahastāvarānvitā.
Pravridhdhaghonātubhrishankutiilākutilekshana.
Kshutpipāsārditānityambhayadākalahāspadā.

She is very pale, fickle and wicked. She has dirty clothes and unkempt hair. She is cruel, the brahmin widow riding on a chariot whose flag is a crow. She is haggard, has pendulous breasts, holding a shurpa (a bamboo basket). She is crooked and mischievous, she is always hungry and thirsty. She is a dreadful and quarrelsome aspect of Shakti.

Mantra

धूं धूं धूमावती ठः ठः

Dhūm Dhūm Dhūmāvati Ṭhaṭ Ṭhaṭ

Note: For this dhyānam use the Shiva Yantra.

Mātangi Dhyānam

श्यामांगीशशिशोखरान्त्रिनयनं रत्नासहासनस्थिताम् ॥
वेदैर्बाहदण्डैरसिखेटकपाशांकुशधराम् ॥

Shyāmangishashishēkharāntrinayanām ratna-
simhāsanasthitām.
Vedairbāhudandairasikhetāka pāshānkusha-
dharām.

She is enthroned on a jewelled throne, her complexion is black, and the crescent moon is in her crown. She has three eyes. In her hands she holds sword, mace, pasha (noose) and ankusha (hook).

Mantra

ॐ ह्रीं क्लीं हूं मातंग्यैफट्स्वाहा

Om Hrīm Klīm Hūṃ Mātangyai Phaṭ Svāhā

Note: For this dhyānam use the Shiva Yantra.

Kamalātmikā Dhyānam

कान्त्याकांचनसन्निभां हिमगिरिप्रख्यैश्चतुर्भिर्गजै-
र्हस्तोत्क्षिप्तहिरण्मयामृतघटैरासिच्यमानां श्रियम् ॥
बिभ्राणां चरमब्जयुगमभयहस्तैर्किरीटोज्ज्वलां
क्षौमाबद्धनितम्बबिम्बललितां वन्देऽरविन्दस्थिताम् ॥ १ ॥

Kāntyākānchanasannibhāmhimagiriprakhyaiś-
chaturbhirggajaih
hastotkshiptahiranmayāmritaghatairāshichya-
mānāmshriyām.
Bibhrānāmvarmabjayugmamabhaymhashtaim-
kiritojjvalām
Kshoumābaddhanitam babimbabalitām vande ar-
vindasthitām.

I meditate on the Devi whose complexion is as bright as gold. Four elephants pour nectar on her holding four jars made of gold. Her hands hold two lotuses and the other two are in vara (granting boons) and abhaya (dispelling fears) mudras. She wears a most precious jewelled crown, and sits on a lotus.

Mantra

ॐ ऐं ह्रीं श्रीं क्लीं ह्रौं : जगत्प्रसूत्यै नमः
Om Aiṃ Hrīm Shriṃ Klīm Hasouḥ Jagat
Prasutyai Namaḥ

Note: For this dhyanam use the Shiva Yantra.

Daily Practice Program

At this stage you may feel a little overwhelmed but you should not, for we don't expect you to do all the practices, only the ones that you like, or the ones suggested in our list of practice programs. You must use your discretion.

For those people who have become really involved in their yoga practices and want to increase the duration of their program, we have changed the length of the practice programs. From now on we will still give four programs but they will be for 2, 1½, 1 and ½ hour respectively.

Include paschimottanasana into your daily practices, as it is such an important asana.

We have introduced you to some new hand mudras. We have chosen these particular mudras, not only because they are aesthetically beautiful and expressive, but because they can easily be used while doing meditation practices. You don't need to do them all; merely choose any that you like and practise them. Of course, if you prefer to use jnana, chin or chinmaya mudra, then continue to do so¹.

Continue your pranayama practice in the manner that we have explained in the text.

In a way, we feel we are swamping you with meditation practices. But you must choose only the practices that you like. Don't try to practise more than one or two distinct techniques, unless you have time that is. Regularity in one practice is the key to higher awareness, not knowledge of large numbers of techniques or superficial attempts to try all of them. Stick with any that you like, persevere and in this way know from personal experience what they can bring you.

If you like trataka, then you can, if you wish, concentrate on the Sri Yantra². Otherwise practise chidakasha dharana. They are all excellent meditative methods.

And lastly we cannot emphasize enough the importance of karma yoga. Try to practise karma yoga every day. This is not easy, we realize this, but only try. Even a moderate degree of success can transform your life.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	5
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Marjari-asana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	24
Aum chanting	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana	—	30
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	9
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	24
Chidakasha Dharana	—	30
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
Chidakasha Dharana	—	20
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama: Stage 4	—	10
		30

Notes¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3² Topic 6 of this lesson

Lesson 14

All the problems that you face in life, all the ups and downs are really the means to your personal evolution. Everything that you face in life, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is really the means to higher awareness. They really help you. Though they may seem to hinder you from a limited and personal viewpoint at this stage, they are really the tests, the means to your eventual transcendence and total understanding of reality. Though mental disturbances during meditation practices, during everyday life may seem obstacles, they are really the things that help you to become aware of, to confront and remove the personal blocks or hindrances that prevent the flight into higher awareness. Without these apparent obstacles you would never become aware of the imperfections in yourself that prevent higher experience. It is only through your enemies that you can recognize personal hang-ups. It is only through unhappiness that you can recognize seeds of disharmony within yourself. Without day to day problems, you would never try to overcome obstacles. All the turmoils of everyday life are the indicators that stimulate you to overcome your own imperfections. So recognize your problems and use everyday life as the means to attain perfection.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Hatha Yoga: Moola Shodhana

If someone advised you to stick your finger in your rectum, you would probably be offended. Yet this is exactly what we will ask you to do in this topic. The following practice, *moola shodhana*, is concerned entirely with cleaning the anus and rectum with one's finger. It may seem a most unlikely yogic method, but in fact it could help to transform your life, especially if you suffer from constipation or haemorrhoids. It is a simple practice, yet it has numerous beneficial repercussions. Overcome your hesitancy and try it for yourself.

This practice comes more easily to eastern people who habitually clean their anus with water after passing stool. In fact, in countries such as India, there is almost a general tendency to regard the use of paper as unclean, which is exactly the opposite attitude to western people. Each method has its good points: the use of paper prevents direct hand contact with the stool. Water, on the other hand, undoubtedly cleans the anus more thoroughly. In either case, one has to wash one's hands afterwards. Therefore, we feel that water washing of the anus is best, for it ensures that the anal region is perfectly clean. However, this is true only if there is sufficient water available; if there is not, then paper is probably better. We are not really interested in changing your habits in this respect for there are far more important things.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *moola* literally means 'base' or 'root'. In this context, it means anus and rectum. The word *shodhana* means 'purification'. Therefore, *moola shodhana* can be translated as the practice which 'purifies the anus and rectum'.

This technique has various other common names. It is called *moola dhauti*, which means 'anal cleansing'. It is also called *ganesha kriya*. Ganesha is the name of the plump elephant deity of India, and the word *kriya* means 'action'.

Therefore, this name can be translated as the 'elephant action'. Ganesha is closely connected with *mooladhara chakra* (the psychic centre near the region of the anus). This is one reason for the name *ganesha kriya*. Also elephants wash themselves thoroughly with their trunk; possibly they also clean their anus in the same manner, at least externally. This practice is also called *chakrikarma*, which means the 'rotation practice'. It is so called because the finger is rotated within the anus and rectum.

Scriptural references

This practice is widely mentioned in yogic texts. The *Gheranda Samhita* says the following:

"If a person does not practise *moola shodhana*, then the *apana* (function of elimination) does not pass freely." (1:43)

"Clean the anus with the finger. Then repeatedly wash it with water." (1:44)

"This practice removes the hard, fermented stool from the lower colon. Abdominal ailments are removed, the body becomes graceful and healthy and one's digestive fire improves." (1:45)

Turmeric root or finger?

Traditionally, a turmeric root is recommended for this practice. This plant is widely available in India and has great medicinal value as an antiseptic, blood purifier and general cleanser of physical impurities. It has astringent properties and it is for this reason that it is used in *moola shodhana*. It tends to stimulate the nerves of the inside of the anus and rectum, which helps to encourage bowel movement (peristalsis) and a free flow of blood. Thus it physically removes waste material and also stimulates the natural function of the bowels.

Turmeric is not widely available to many countries, but one's finger can be used instead for *moola shodhana*. This is as good as turmeric, for though it is not astringent, there is more facility for manipulation. The essential

point to remember is that your nails should be short and you should carefully clean your hands after the practice.

Position

The best position to practise in is a squatting position. This again is ideally done in the Indian squat toilet. Incidentally, it is worthwhile pointing out that the squatting position is the best for elimination of stool. This is widely accepted in modern medical circles and can be tested by personal experience. The seat toilet may be very comfortable, but this position does not encourage the best possible evacuation. If everyone adopted squat toilets, there would be far fewer cases of constipation. The squat allows the anus to open and function more freely. Furthermore, the squat position applies a firm pressure on the abdomen; this tends to help push the stool towards the anus for expulsion.

If you use seat toilets, then you can at least adopt the squatting position for moola shodhana. We see no reason why you should not try to squat by standing on top of the seat, though it may look a little strange. Make sure you don't harm yourself.

MOOLA SHODHANA

Assume a squatting position.

Insert one finger (either middle or index) into the anus.

If necessary, you can use ghee or some other type of oil as a lubricant; or you can use soap or water.

Push your finger inside to a depth of about 2 cms as first.

Then gently rotate your finger in both directions.

By doing this you will slowly be able to push your finger further into the rectum.

Don't force. The sphincter muscles will relax.

Continue to rotate your finger, inserting it as deeply as possible; this will stimulate the nerves and functions of the rectum.

Then remove your finger and wash it.

Reinsert your finger and again rotate it for some time.

Again remove and wash.

Repeat a number of times.

Make sure you apply a firm but gentle pressure on the walls of the anus and rectum.

Precautions

1. Make sure that you cut the nail of the finger that you insert. The anus and rectum are very sensitive, and long nails could easily cause damage. If you don't want to cut your nails, then you will have to use a turmeric plant.
2. Make sure that you scrupulously wash your hands after the practice.
3. If you suffer from haemorrhoids, then you should take great care when you insert your finger. This practice will help to remove the ailment but you must insert and massage carefully. As your condition improves with practice then you can increase the pressure of massage. Your own common sense will guide you in this respect.

Muscle contraction

If you wish you can intensify the practice by alternately contracting and releasing the anal sphincter while your finger is inserted. This will increase the stimulation of the nerves and the blood supply in the rectum, which in turn will lead to improved health and functioning of this important part of the body.

Water

When you wash your hands during the practice use cold water. Also, if possible, try to wash the anus with cold water. This is important, for cold water specifically stimulates blood flow to the region. This further tones the anal sphincter and prevents stagnation of blood and the possibility of haemorrhoids. Cold water also contracts the blood vessels which helps to alleviate extended veins. Hot water is not to be used for it tends to act in the opposite manner.

This, incidentally, is another good recommendation for washing one's anus with cold water after passing stool: it tones up the entire anus and rectum.

When to practise

This depends on your personal circumstances. The stimulation induced by moola shodhana is sufficient to start off a chain reaction of peristalsis. Therefore, those who are constipated are advised to practise before trying to defecate.

If you have a regular motion then you can try moola shodhana after passing stool. This

will further stimulate the associated nerves and muscles and lead to the best possible evacuation and cleanliness of the anus and rectum. The best time is early in the morning.

Benefits

Let us first of all briefly discuss the anatomy of the area. There are two parts: the anus proper and the rectum. The anus is comprised of two sphincters, which can be dilated and contracted at will. You can test this for yourself. These sphincter muscles seal the exit of the anus until the time of defecation. The anus is about two centimetres long, after which it merges with the rectum. The rectum continues upwards for a short distance to join the lower part of the descending colon.

If you insert your finger you will feel striations or projections. There are seven or eight of these, and are about one centimetre in height. There are also valves in this area. There is a rich supply of nerves and blood vessels. It is these blood vessels that so easily distend to form haemorrhoids. This region is directly supplied by nerves from the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems.

So how does moola shodhana help us? It acts as follows:

- Stimulates the nerves and blood vessels – this encourages the whole eliminative system to function efficiently.
- Encourages regular and strain-free defecation.
- Cleans the whole area of hard, encrusted and putrid waste matter.
- Removes and prevents ailments such as constipation and haemorrhoids (piles).
- Helps to change one's attitude towards life. The wonder of a regular free motion leads to a more relaxed disposition. Such a simple practice, but it has far reaching effects.

Constipation is an ailment of sedentary modern life¹. It is caused by excessive worry and frustration and by insufficient exercise. It is caused by irregular toilet habits, straining, and stodgy food such as white bread, dump-lings, etc. There are other causes but these are the main ones. Sedentary life leads to insufficient blood flow and nervous stimulation of specific areas of the body. The body processes lose their strength and efficiency. In the case of constipation, it is the region of the large intestine that suffers.

The elimination of constipation is important for it has repercussions on other parts of the body. When the flow of faeces is constant, then the rest of the digestive tract will also work more efficiently. This is because the entire tract functions as a whole, even though each organ has a different name. It is an integral system. If the process of defecation is normal, then the associated organs such as the liver, pancreas, etc. will also be able to work more easily and effectively. The whole system is less susceptible to ailments. We recommend that sufferers of constipation follow the suggestions previously given, and start to regularly practise moola shodhana¹. It will only take a few minutes daily, yet the benefits will be vast.

Haemorrhoids is also a common ailment associated with constipation. It can arise directly from constipation. It also arises through coagulation of blood through bad circulation. This is related to lack of exercise and is similar to varicose veins. Near the end of the rectum, the numerous blood vessels group together to form bunches or plexuses. During constipation, hardened stool accumulates in the rectum, exerting a pressure on these vessels, which are very thin-walled. This causes the blood flow to slow down, stagnate and even congeal. This congealed blood (thrombi) forces the blood vessels to expand in order to allow some blood flow to take place. This distension occurs inwards towards the centre of the rectal cavity. It initiates a vicious circle. The dilated vessels expand against the hardened stool. If the stool moves it produces irritations, inflammation and pain in the vessels. Because there is a large amount of blood in this region, and because the walls of the stretched veins are even thinner than normal, bleeding occurs very easily and scabs tend to form. This is the trauma of haemorrhoids.

For haemorrhoids we specifically recommend inverted asanas to help drain the blood and also alternate contraction and relaxation of the anal muscles (ashwini mudra)². Also fasting is recommended. We suggest that you practise moola shodhana regularly, taking special care, and using some form of lubrication. This will encourage smooth movement. Also this lubricant will prevent the area becoming too dry. This dryness, which is most common in old age, leads to irritation and clogging of faeces in the rectum. If this

clogging becomes serious, then the whole system becomes totally blocked. This leads to ill health of the whole body. Therefore, we especially recommend moola shodhana for those people who suffer from constipation and haemorrhoids.

Moola shodhana is a simple yet effective technique. It is well worth your while to overcome all hesitations and doubt and experience the benefits for yourself.

Notes

¹ For further details on constipation refer to
Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 1

² Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Asanas: Practice

The asana we will describe in this topic is called *yoga mudrasana*. Though it is known as a mudra, it is really best described as an asana. In a sense, it is a combination of *paschimottanasana*¹ and *padmasana*². Those people who can sit in *padmasana* will have little difficulty in doing *yoga mudrasana*. Others however, who still find it difficult if not impossible to sit in *padmasana*, even though they have been practising earnestly and regularly for some time, will not be able to do the full form of *yoga mudrasana* at this stage. Instead, you should try the simpler alternative method done in *ardha padmasana*, that is described at the end of this topic. Furthermore, you should spend more time practising the premeditative exercises, in order to eventually master *padmasana* and *yoga mudrasana*³.

Many of the people who can sit in *padmasana* will not be able to do so for more than a few minutes without extreme discomfort. *Yoga mudrasana* is an excellent practice for further loosening up the knees and the hip joints and thereby allowing you to sit in *padmasana* as well as other meditative sitting poses, for prolonged periods of time. This is most important in order to gain the most out of meditation practices in general, and *kriya yoga* in the future. It is essential in order to be able to forget the body and to be able to introspect. It is impossible to introspect or even think about doing meditation practices if your attention is overwhelmed by pain in the legs. *Yoga mudrasana* is useful for overcoming this initial hurdle, as well as helping to promote the right mental attitude.

YOGA MUDRASANA (PSYCHIC UNION POSE)

The Sanskrit word *yoga* needless to say means 'union'; and a *mudra* is a 'mental or physical expression of an inner feeling' or 'attitude'.

Furthermore, it is not only an expression of a feeling, but it is also a means, if properly used, of invoking inner power and realization. There are far, far more implications, but this is not the place to discuss them. This asana is so called because it is said to unite the practitioner with his inner being.

In English, this asana is usually called the 'symbol of yoga' or the 'psychic union pose'. These are in fact inadequate translations, for the two words '*yoga mudrasana*' convey far more and have vast implications. We much prefer the Sanskrit name.

Loosening up exercises

Before sitting in *padmasana* and doing *yoga mudrasana* the legs should be loosened up. This also applies to people who have no difficulty sitting in *padmasana*, for the legs quickly stiffen up. Stiffness can be most effectively removed from the legs by doing the following simple exercises: i) half butterfly ii) hip rotation, together with other useful exercises previously described³, you can choose any that you wish to practise, though we recommend the above two. Of course, if your legs are not stiff, it is not necessary to practise these preliminary exercises.

Position of hands

During the performance of *yoga mudrasana* the hands can be held in a variety of positions. You should experiment to find the hand position that you prefer.

1. Arms behind the back, with the fingers of both hands interlocked.
2. Arms behind the back, with the left hand holding the right wrist.
3. Same as 2 but with the right hand doing *jnana mudrasana*⁴. Any other suitable hand *mudrasana* can also be used.
4. Hands in front of the body. Fold your fingers and place both fists on your lap, with the wrists facing upwards and the

thumb slightly out and downwards. The fists should be held in contact with the soft part of the abdomen, just below the ribs. This hand position will apply extra massage to the abdomen.

Basic technique

Sit in padmasana². Close the eyes.

Hold the hands behind the back in the way described in variations 1, 2 and 3 under the previous heading.

This is the starting position.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Then inhale deeply. Exhale while slowly bending the trunk forwards.

Try to touch your forehead on the ground in front of your body; if this is impossible, merely bend forwards as far as you can comfortably.

This is the final pose.

Relax the whole body, especially the back, as much as possible. Breathe slowly and deeply, feeling the expansion and contraction of the abdomen.

Stay in the final position for as long as you can. Then slowly raise the body to the starting position, while breathing in.

This is the basic technique.



Breathing

The breathing should be synchronized with the physical movement during yoga mudrasana. This is important. For clarity, the breathing sequence is listed below.

Breathe normally in the starting position, while relaxing the mind and body. Then inhale deeply once before bending forwards. Exhale as you lean forwards. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Inhale as you return to the starting position.

Alternative techniques

There are useful variations to the basic technique. They are as follows:

Variation 1: ideal for beginners

Same as basic method, except that the breath

is held for a short duration in the final pose, after which the body is returned to the starting position. That is, instead of staying in the final pose, the body is lowered and raised a number of times. This is particularly useful for those people who have a stiff body and who cannot touch the floor with their forehead.

Take care that the physical movement is synchronized with breathing.

Variation 2: for elongating the spine

This technique can be practised by those people who can touch their foreheads to the floor. Take the final pose of yoga mudrasana as described in the basic technique.

Immobilize the body and inhale.

While exhaling, try to touch the floor with the chin and push it away from the body.

Immobilize the body and inhale.

Exhale and again try to push the chin as far as possible away from the body.

Repeat this procedure. Don't strain.

Then relax the whole body and remain in the final pose breathing slowly and deeply.

After a comfortable period of time return to the starting position while inhaling.

Variation 3: for optimum massage of the abdomen

This variation is ideal for those people who suffer from wind, constipation or various other abdominal ailments.

Place the hands in front of the body in the way described in the previous heading 'Position of Hands' for alternative 4. That is, the fists should be placed on top of the upturned heels, the right fist on the left sole and the left fist on the right sole.

The method is exactly the same as given for the basic technique.

This variation gives a powerful compression of the abdomen though it does not stretch the back as much as the other techniques.

Leg joint realignment exercises

After completing yoga mudrasana or padmasana the leg joints tend to lock. If you straighten your legs too quickly you might experience pain or injure your joints. This seems to apply to some individuals, and not to others. Therefore, you should take great care to slowly unfold your legs from padmasana, allowing the joints to realign themselves.

When the legs are straightened in front of the body, 'there may still be stiffness. The best way to remove this is to slowly bend each leg in turn, so that the knee comes towards the chest. You can do this once or twice with each leg. If you hear a slight cracking don't worry, for this is merely the joints clicking into position. If you hear a crunching sound, however, then you can start worrying, but this is most unlikely to happen if you carefully follow the advice we have given.

If you wish, you can also rotate your feet from the ankles a number of times to remove stiffness in this region, or gently move the legs up and down, keeping the heels on the floor.

General advice

- There is no reason why beginners should not place a cushion or folded blanket under the buttocks, because this will make the asana much easier to perform. Of course, when you become proficient then this aid should be discarded.
- Do not under any circumstances strain the legs and back. Immediately stop the forward bend if you feel excessive pain.
- Make sure that the breathing is perfectly coordinated with the physical movement.
- If possible, ensure that the heels (or fists in variation 3) press firmly into the abdomen. This will allow maximum efficacy of the asana.
- Try to remain as relaxed as possible, especially in the final pose.

Counterpose

Yoga mudrasana is a forward bending asana. Therefore, it is ideally preceded and followed by a backward bending asana, such as *ushtrasana*⁵, *bhujangasana*⁶, *shalabhasana*⁷ as well as many other asanas that we have yet to describe. The counterpose will bend the spine in the opposite direction, and stretch and compress the associated muscles and nerves in the opposite sense. This will encourage the best possible health of the body.

Awareness

Awareness can be directed to relaxation of the back, the abdomen and breathing. The last is preferred, especially in the final position, combined with awareness of the physical movement during the lowering and raising of the body.

Duration

Try to remain in the final pose for as long as possible. During your practice program, two or three minutes is a reasonable duration. Of course, beginners should not stay in the final pose for a long time; the duration should be slowly increased with practice. Beginners, especially those who are stiff, should do variation 1 for a few minutes, alternately raising and lowering the body to the final pose. If it is difficult to sit in *padmasana* for more than a few seconds then there is no reason why you should not unfold your legs, do the exercises given under the heading 'Leg joint Realignment Exercises', refold your legs into *padmasana* and repeat *yoga mudrasana*. This can be repeated a number of times. It is an excellent method of loosening up the legs for those persons who can sit, though uncomfortably, in *padmasana*.

After a long period of mental work, about fifteen minutes in the final pose of *yoga mudrasana* quickly brings revitalization and calmness to mind and body.

Limitations

If you suffer from sciatica, high blood pressure, hernia or any other serious abdominal ailment, you should not attempt to do *yoga mudrasana*, unless you have sought expert advice.

Precautions

Stiffness of the legs, particularly the knees, may initially prevent one from doing *yoga mudrasana*. Don't strain, for the anatomy of the knee joint is such that it is designed specifically to move in one plane. Its design is simplicity itself and its strength and support comes mainly from ligaments. If used properly its strength is more than adequate for normal use, yet misuse can easily tear the ligaments. If this happens many months are required for full repair. So be careful.

Benefits

Yoga mudrasana may be a little difficult at first, but the benefits it will give are well worth the effort. It is particularly useful for massaging the abdominal organs and helping to remove various associated ailments from constipation to diabetes. The upturned heels apply good pressure, which is transmitted to the inner organs. Variation 3 is especially powerful for

the massage is accentuated by means of the fists.

The asana reduces the blood flow to the legs and diverts it to the abdominal and pelvic region, which further helps to improve the functioning of these organs and can help to alleviate various types of sexual disorders.

During the practice, the individual vertebrae are separated from each other. This helps to release pressure on the spinal nerves as well as giving them a profound stretch and massage. These nerves connect the entire body to the brain and their improved health and functioning will have beneficial repercussions throughout the body.

The legs are not stretched as with other forward bending asanas, yet the articulations of the joints are loosened. With regular practise these joints will become permanently loosened and one will be able to sit in padmasana for many hours.

Yoga mudrasana, as we have pointed out already, is most useful for relaxing the whole mind and body. As such it is an excellent prelude to meditative practices, especially if there is no initial program of asanas. That is, there are times when there is no time or it is unsuitable to do a number of asanas before commencing meditative practices. Under these circumstances yoga mudrasana should be practised as a prelude.

Supplementary practice for beginners

Some people may have reasonable leg flexibility, but not sufficient to sit in padmasana and thereby do yoga mudrasana. Under these circumstances, there is absolutely no reason why you should not sit in ardha padmasana and practise a modified form of yoga mudrasana².

The procedure is as follows:

Fold your right leg on top of the left in ardha padmasana.

Perform yoga mudrasana in the manner described for the basic technique, bending down between the knees.

Resume the starting position.

Now go down to the right knee, trying to touch the floor with the forehead; don't strain, only try.

Come up.

Down on the left knee. Come up.

Repeat the same procedure bending down

between the knees again; you should find increased flexibility.

On resuming the starting position, straighten the legs and remove the stiffness in the joints in the way described under the heading 'Leg Joint Realignment Exercises'.

Then fold the left leg on top of the right leg in ardha padmasana.

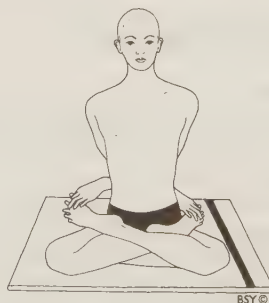
This is an excellent method of loosening up the legs in order to eventually attain padmasana as well as simultaneously obtaining many of the benefits of yoga mudrasana.

If one of your legs is stiffer than the other, then you should spend a longer duration doing this practice with that leg uppermost.

BADDHA PADMASANA (LOCKED LOTUS POSE)

Baddha padmasana is a wonderful asana for those persons who find yoga mudrasana easy to do; It is an asana that really deserves a totally separate treatment. However, we have introduced it at this point because of its close similarity to yoga mudrasana. It accentuates the benefits of yoga mudrasana and can in a sense be regarded as an advanced form.

The Sanskrit word *baddha* means 'bound', 'locked' or 'tied'. Therefore, this asana can be called the 'bound lotus pose' or the 'locked lotus pose'.



Technique

Sit in padmasana.

Place the feet as high as possible on the thighs so that the toes are near each side of the waist. Place the right arm behind the back and try to grasp the big toe of the right leg.

To do this, it is best to breathe out deeply, lean forward slightly and push the shoulder blades towards each other behind the back.

Grasp the left big toe with the left hand crossed behind the back. This is not easy at first but becomes easier with practice.

Having grasped both toes, sit upright in padmasana. Breathe normally and relax the whole body.

Repeat the same procedure that we have described for the basic technique of yoga mudrasana.

Try to stay in the final pose for as long as possible, breathing slowly and deeply.

After finishing the asana straighten the legs and do the exercises given under the heading 'Leg Joint Realignment Exercises' for yoga mudrasana.

General details

All other details are as given for yoga mudrasana. Baddha padmasana gives all the benefits of yoga mudrasana and more. In particular it produces a good chest expansion and thereby encourages chest development. The internal massage of the abdominal organs is particularly profound because of the position of the heels; this is notably enhanced if one breathes deeply in the final pose. Baddha padmasana is particularly useful for alleviating back and neck ache. It is excellent as a preliminary for meditative practices.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3 and Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4.

⁴ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

⁵ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3

⁶ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

⁷ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 3

Bandhas: Jalandhara Bandha

Bandhas are a small but very important group of yogic practices. They are an essential part of kriya yoga, where they are combined with various other yogic techniques. It is therefore necessary for the reader to master each of them before beginning kriya yoga. It is for this reason that we have introduced them at this early stage in the course. Furthermore, the practice of nadi shodhana pranayama has reached a level whereby it can be powerfully combined with bandhas¹. This will intensify the entire practice by increasing the duration of breath retention.

The word *bandha* means 'to hold', 'tighten' or 'lock', and this exactly describes the physical action necessary to perform these practices. Specific parts of the body are gently yet powerfully contracted and tightened. This has vast repercussions. First of all various parts of the physical body are controlled. Organs, muscles, nerves and physical processes within the body are massaged, stimulated and brought under the will of the practitioner. The physical contraction or lock in turn has an extensive influence on the psychic body (pranic body). The flow of prana that continuously streams through our subtle body is redirected and even stopped. This has direct influences on the mind. The whole body and mind is tranquillized and made receptive to higher states of awareness. Such is the power of bandhas when they are perfected.

Traditional yogic texts speak of the three granthis called the *brahma*, *vishnu* and *rudra* granthis. These represent psychic blocks and mental problems that prevent an individual 'soaring' into the realms of meditation. These blocks or knots have to be removed if one wants to know the experience of higher awareness. They can be removed either permanently or temporarily. Bandhas are particularly effective in breaking open or removing these blocks, at least for a short

period of time and this temporary removal helps to eliminate these blocks permanently. In yogic language, these granthis prevent the flow of prana into the main pranic passage of the body – the *sushumna*. When they are released, prana immediately begins to flow through *sushumna nadi*, which leads to increased receptivity of the mind and in turn higher experiences.

These granthis are located in the following parts of the body:

Brahma granthi – pelvis (mooladhara chakra)

Vishnu granthi – heart (anahata chakra)

Rudra granthi – centre of head (ajna chakra)

Remember, these so-called knots are in the psychic body, not in the physical body, but physical manipulations such as bandhas can unlock them. Each level of manifestation has repercussions on other levels. It is not realistic to rigidly separate the physical body, pranic body and the mind body. They are all inter-related and really part of a whole. They are only divided or categorized for convenience of explanation.

Therefore, the physical body influences the mind and pranic body. The pranic body influences the mind and physical body. And the mind influences the pranic and physical body. If you doubt this then you should read the book entitled *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*, where scientific evidence is given. Better still you should practise yoga, develop sensitivity and find out from your own experience.

Bandhas, like all other yogic practices, act on and influence different levels of individual being. They have profound effects on the physical, pranic and mental levels.

JALANDHARA BANDHA (THROAT LOCK)

The Sanskrit word *jalan* means 'net'. The word *dhara* means 'stream', 'mass of flowing fluid'.

This leaves the meaning of the word *jalandhara* open to various interpretations. The most likely is that it means 'net' or 'cluster of nadis' or 'pathways'. Therefore, jalandhara is the practice or physical lock that controls the net or network of nadis in the neck. These nadis can be either blood vessels, nerves or pranic passages. The 'fluid' or stream can cover all these different levels of subtlety, for jalandhara bandha will influence all of them.

There is another explanation of the meaning. There are sixteen specific centres in the body called *adharas*. This word means 'base' or 'substratum'. They refer to chakras which are located in the following sixteen regions of the body: toes, ankles, knees, thighs, perineum, coccyx, navel, heart, neck, tonsils, tongue, nose, eyebrow centre, eyes, back of the head and crown of the head. In various practices one's awareness is rotated through these centres. Prana flows through these regions within the pranic body. Therefore, jalandhara bandha can also be defined as the practice that locks the pranic network in the neck. This prevents flow of prana between these centres and directs prana into sushumna nadi.

Scriptural references

There are numerous scriptural references to jalandhara bandha. The following are a select few from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

"Contract the throat and firmly press the chin against the chest. This is called jalandhara bandha and helps to prevent old age and death." (3:70)

"It blocks all the nadis in the neck, checks the fall of amrit (divine fluid) which drops from the heavens. It should be done to cure throat ailments." (3:71)

"The contraction of the throat during jalandhara bandha prevents the amrit falling into the digestive fire. In this way prana is conserved (that is, the prana is controlled and directed only into the sushumna; flow of prana in the other nadis ceases)." (3:72)

"This contraction of the throat also immobilizes the flow of prana in the ida and pingala nadis (associated with the flow of breath in the left and right nostrils). Again this blocks the flow of prana to the sixteen adharas and directs it into the sushumna." (3:73)

These four verses give fertile ground for thought and indicate the importance of this

bandha. The *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* also has much to say on jalandhara bandha:

"The sadhaka (aspirant) should sit in padmasana with hands folded across his lap. The chin should be firmly pressed against the throat. One should reflect completely on Brahman (the supreme) with the breath retained. In this manner, the sadhaka will attain immense power and knowledge." (verse 40)

"He who is able to retain the element akasha (ether) and the fluids which have a downward tendency, will remove all frustration and dissatisfaction." (verse 50)

"By the practice of jalandhara bandha, the nectar amrit which tends to flow downwards from the centre of the head is restrained. The nectar does not fall into the fire (is not burned up) and the pranic forces of the body are prevented from moving hither and thither." (verse 51)

There are many more quotations in other texts, but this is sufficient to give you an idea of the importance of this practice. We leave it to the reader to fully understand the meaning of these verses through personal experience.

Kumbhaka

The breath is to be retained during jalandhara bandha. The retention can either be antar kumbhaka (inner retention) or bahir kumbhaka (outer retention) or both, depending on the practice and integration with other techniques². That is, one can either breathe in deeply, fully inflating the lungs and then do jalandhara bandha, or one can exhale deeply and then do jalandhara bandha. Both methods have their use in association with other practices.

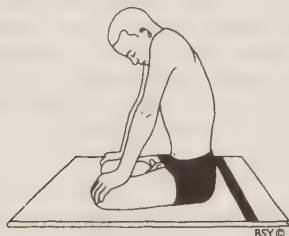
We have already emphasized that the duration of kumbhaka should not be more than is comfortable. This also applies to jalandhara bandha. Don't strain under any circumstances. Increase the duration of breath retention over a period of weeks and months. If you have been regularly practising nadi shodhana in the way that we have suggested, then you will find no difficulty doing jalandhara bandha for a reasonable period of time.

Position

Jalandhara bandha can be done in a large number of different positions. The best positions are padmasana, siddhasana or

siddha yoni asana³. In kriya yoga it will be necessary to practise jalandhara bandha while sitting in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana. At this stage however, you can practise in any pose that you find comfortable. This includes ardha padmasana, swastikasana and vajrasana³. It is essential that the knees touch the ground, therefore sukhasana is not suitable. Jalandhara bandha can also be done in the standing position but this is not so commonly used.

Your aim should be to eventually master jalandhara bandha while doing either padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.



Technique

Take a comfortable sitting pose.

Make sure the knees are firmly in contact with the ground.

Place the palms of your hands on the knees.

Close the eyes.

Relax the whole body.

Inhale deeply.

Retain the breath inside the lungs.

Then bend the head forwards and press the chin tightly against the chest, in particular against the sternum.

Straighten your arms so that they are locked; that is, you have to gently but firmly push your elbows towards each other as though you are trying to bend your arms inwards instead of outwards.

Your hands should remain on the knees.

This action will tend to intensify the pressure applied in the region of the neck.

Simultaneously, hunch your shoulders upwards and forwards – this will help to ensure that the straight arms are firmly locked.

Stay in the final position for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Then relax the shoulders.

Bend the arms outwards and release the lock.

Slowly raise your head.

Then exhale.

This is 1 round.

Breathe normally.

When your breathing rate returns to normal you can repeat another round.

Note: This practice can also be done with the breath exhaled immediately before doing the bandha. That is, it can be done with the breath retained externally.

Awareness

Maintain awareness on the region of the throat and on mental counting of the duration of breath retention.

Precautions

Don't exhale or inhale, whatever the case may be, until you have released the chin lock, arm lock and the head is raised. Slowly develop the length of breath retention over a period of time. This will allow your body mechanism to slowly adapt and accustom itself to the new duties. Don't strain under any circumstances.

Number of rounds

You can do as many rounds as you wish providing you experience absolutely no discomfort. Beginners should slowly increase the number of rounds, starting from five.

Conjunction with other practices

As we have already pointed out, jalandhara bandha can be combined with various other practices of yoga. It is particularly suitable and powerful when combined with nadi shodhana pranayama¹. In your daily yoga program, it is best to practise jalandhara bandha after asanas and immediately before meditation practices. This will help you to relax, and also to be attentive and awake, allowing you to gain the most out of the meditative techniques.

Limitations

People who suffer from high blood pressure or heart ailments should not do jalandhara bandha. Though it initially reduces blood pressure, the release of the bandha brings some fluttering of the heart.

Physiological viewpoint

Jalandhara bandha compresses the carotid sinuses. These are bodies located on the carotid arteries in the neck, which are the main arteries supplying blood to the brain. These carotid bodies are called baroreceptors

and help to regulate and match the heart rate and blood pressure with the respiration system. These receptors feed messages to the brain through the sinus nerves, which in turn takes the necessary actions to balance the circulatory and respiratory systems. The carotid bodies become compressed if the blood pressure rises. This sends a message to the brain which takes steps to prevent this high blood pressure. In jalandhara bandha, these receptors are artificially compressed. This tends to prevent a sudden rise in blood pressure which would be expected when the breath is held for some time. This increases the duration of breath retention and so increases the effectiveness of practices such as nadi shodhana pranayama.

These carotid sinuses were well known in ancient times, as were also the sinus nerves. In the *Shiva Samhita* it says: "Stop the flow of the *vijnana nadis* (sinus nerves) with the second fingers (that is, press the side of the neck with your fingers). This gives *siddhi* (perfection) in the form of happiness and bliss." (55, 56) We don't suggest you try this for you will more than likely become unconscious if you are not careful. This is caused by reducing or preventing the blood flow to the brain. But the implications of the above verses are obvious; if you gently press these carotid sinuses then you will become very relaxed and perhaps a little faint. This can be a help in various other yogic practices that lead to meditation experience.

These carotid sinuses are widely known in modern times. Many people have fainted by mere pressure of these bodies. Some people seem to be more sensitive than others; a slight pressure is sufficient to put some people on their back. It is also widely known in wrestling, boxing, etc. where through discreet pressure on the opponent's neck, it is possible to almost instantly finish the match. This is regarded as foul play.

It is also interesting to note that these carotid sinuses can be pressed to prevent or counteract tachycardia (fast heartbeat beyond the normal limit). This is often used in medical circles. A gentle massage of the carotid sinuses slows down the heart rate and brings about a faster normalization. However, this is not always the case. It depends on the ability to select exactly the right place for massage and to do it gently enough to prevent an increase in tension. That is, overpressurization of the carotid bodies

could easily bring into mobilization the emergency activities of the body to induce greater flow of blood to the brain. This will tend to increase the heartbeat again which is exactly the opposite to that which is required. So care must be taken.

We have not discussed the carotid sinuses to encourage you to tamper with them. We have discussed them to show how jalandhara bandha acts directly on the physical body, and how one must be careful of overexertion during the practice.

Benefits

Jalandhara bandha influences the individual at all levels: physical, psychic and mental. It controls the flow of prana in the body. This induces mental relaxation and can help to induce meditation. The pressurization of the carotid sinuses also helps to bring mental balance by slowing down the heart. Furthermore, this encourages introversion – one tends to become oblivious to the outside world. The whole nervous system and brain become sedated. One tends to become more one-pointed. All this is a great help in meditation practices.

Jalandhara bandha allows one to hold the breath for longer periods of time. Normally decrease of oxygen and increase of carbon dioxide in the system lead to an increase of the heart rate and harder breathing to compensate. This is initiated through the carotid sinuses. The artificial pressure of these sinuses during jalandhara bandha prevents this tendency. Therefore, one is able to hold the breath for much longer periods. This also helps to induce one-pointedness of mind for meditation practices.

This bandha closes the windpipe and compresses various organs in the throat. Notably it massages the thyroid gland which is located in the cavity of the throat. The whole body depends on this gland for perfect development and maintenance. Jalandhara bandha massages this gland and helps to render it efficient.

Notes

¹ Topic 4 of this lesson.

² Antar kumbhaka – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4; Bahir kumbhaka – Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

There is a very close relationship between pranayama and meditation techniques. Control of prana through pranayama eventually leads to cessation of the ceaseless fluctuations of the mind. Systematic dampening and calming of the mind through meditation techniques leads to control of the prana. The mind and prana are directly related. If the mind is like a restless monkey jumping from one thought to another, how can meditation be successfully practised? The aim of both pranayama and meditation techniques is the same: perfect receptivity and quiescence of mind so that one can know higher experience.

In the state of samadhi the prana ceases to flow in the body. Pranayama, therefore, tries to bring about samadhi by directly controlling and eventually stopping the flow of prana. This leads directly to samadhi. In the monumental yogic scripture called the *Yoga Vāsishtha* it says: "Through these practices (pranayama and meditative practices), the prana can be controlled. In this manner one is freed from sorrow, filled with divine ecstasy and becomes enraptured with the supreme experience. If the prana is controlled, the mind will also become very calm. There is an intimate connection between the mind and prana. If the mind is rendered perfectly quiet, then only Brahman (the supreme) remains."

Therefore, don't regard pranayama as mere breathing exercises – it has far greater implications. But it will only bring results if you practise carefully and regularly. Pranayama should become an important part of your daily practice. Asanas, pranayama and meditation all affect the differing aspects of your personality.

Practice

In this lesson we have explained the technique of jalandhara bandha¹. This is perfectly suited for integration with the stages of kumbhaka of nadi shodhana pranayama.

Integration of jalandhara bandha and nadi shodhana stage 4

In the previous lesson we gave the ratio of 1:8:6:2: 1:8:6:2 for the complete practice of nadi shodhana. Now while retaining the same ratio begin to integrate jalandhara bandha. Eventually you can practise the bandha for both antar kumbhaka and bahir kumbhaka, but at this stage the practice of jalandhara only with antar kumbhaka is sufficient.

The basic technique is as follows:

Sit comfortably in any position.

Breathe in through the left nostril for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 1

Then bend your head forwards and do jalandhara bandha.

Retain your breath inside for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 8

On completion, release the bandha.

Breathe out through the right nostril for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 6

Retain the breath outside for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 2

Breathe in through the right nostril for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 1

Do jalandhara bandha.

Hold the breath for a duration fixed by the ratio . . . 8

Then release the bandha.

Breathe out through the left nostril . . . 6

Retain your breath outside according to the ratio . . . 2

This is 1 round.

Continue for as many rounds as you have time available.

Warning

If you feel any tendency towards suffocating then you should immediately stop the practice. Start again when you feel perfectly normal.

Notes

¹ Topic 3 of this lesson

Meditation: Japa (Part 1)

Many people are in a hurry for the experience of meditation. This is understandable, yet no amount of haste or aspiration will bring the experience unless the tricky and tempestuous mind is calmed. Meditation is a spontaneous process that can only occur when the mind has been brought to a certain level of harmony and one-pointedness. This applies whether the mind is calmed for a short or a prolonged time. It must be harmonized. Without this, meditation cannot arise. One of the simplest, safest and most systematic meditative practices is called *japa*. It is a method that is suitable for everyone without exception.

The prime concern of most people should be to confront and exhaust inner conflicts and suppressed desires. *Japa* is a useful method of slowly drawing out the negative aspects of the subconscious part of the mind, with much less likelihood of possible nasty or unpleasant side effects. It relaxes the personal arena of the mind, which in turn can lead to the natural occurrence of meditation. *Japa* is an excellent preparatory technique for *kriya yoga*, for it tunes the mind so that one can gain the most out of the practices. Furthermore, *japa* in itself is an integral part of *kriya yoga*. Therefore, if you practise *japa* then you will be laying a valuable foundation for the future.

Japa generally requires the use of a *mala* (set of beads).

JAPA – PART 1

The Sanskrit word *japa* means 'to rotate'. The practice is so called because it involves continuous rotation of a *mala*, synchronized with a mantra. Generally the practice is done for a fixed number of mantra repetitions, or for a set period of time. The chanting can be aloud or silent. *Japa* can be further defined as rhythmic mantra chanting with *mala* rotation and with awareness. For maximum benefits it must be practised regularly.

The universal system

Japa is probably the most widespread and universal meditative system. It is an integral part of *yoga* and *tantra* as well as Hinduism in general. Many traditional scriptures describe the practices and merits of *japa*, especially tantric texts. Many of the ancient yogis are pictured practising *japa*. According to tradition, Brahma, the creator of the universe caused everything to be created by continual *japa* of the mantra Aum. Such is the importance of *japa* in the spiritual life.

Japa is not only confined to India. The Buddhist path of Mahayana widely uses *japa* with a *mala* of 108 beads plus 3 extra beads, which represent the refuge in the Dharma, Buddha and Sangha respectively. The more orthodox systems of Christianity also widely use *japa*. Anyone who has been to a Roman Catholic monastery, nunnery or school will have seen the monks or nuns rotating their rosaries. Anyone who has been to Greece or other Balkan countries, where the Greek Orthodox Church is prevalent, will know that nearly all men carry a rosary with them. Whatever they do, whether walking, talking, sitting or working they continually rotate their beads wherever it is possible. Whether most of these people realize the reason for the rosary is uncertain, but nevertheless the tradition continues. It seems more than a possibility that this system was introduced so that each individual could practise *japa* throughout the whole day.

Rationale

Concentration is impossible for most people for there are too many inner and outer disturbances. During meditative practice one is either overwhelmed by a continuous stream of inner mental chatter, worries, etc. or on the other hand, one is unable to break away from external noises and other disturbances. Both of these distractions prevent meditation. Of

course, the inability to shut off outer noises is really a by-product of inner turmoil; if there is inner peace then one can automatically shut off outer influences.

Another trap in meditative practices is sleep. It is so easy for the practitioner to gain a little relaxation and, because this is such a rare thing, immediately start feeling drowsy and fall asleep. One must relax but remain wide awake. We have said this so many times before, but we are repeating it because this is a trap that many people fall into. Another trap is forced concentration. Many people realize the importance of concentration and try to force it, which causes tension and is not real concentration. Real concentration arises naturally through a relaxed mind.

So we have a dilemma, either:

1. One does not try to concentrate. This generally leads to the pitfalls already mentioned – namely sleep, absorption in outside noises, etc. or forgetfulness in the inner bubbling thoughts of the mind.
2. One forces concentration in an endeavour to prevent sleep or the tendency to lose oneself in the outer world or the thought process. This generally leads to mental tension.

Both of the above approaches are incorrect and will tend to lead one away from gaining the benefits of the meditative practice. The answer as we have already said is not to concentrate, but instead remain aware¹. Japa is a wonderful system of maintaining individual awareness. Furthermore, it prevents the practitioner becoming lost either in the outer world or in the inner world of thoughts. It also helps to prevent sleep or drowsiness. Let us discuss how this is achieved.

During *japa*, one has to do two things: chant a mantra and rotate the beads of the mala. These act as a point of reference for awareness. After a short time of practice one gets into a rhythm; the movement of the mala becomes synchronized with the chanting. Your mind and body (one hand) have to do something. This prevents the pitfalls that we have already mentioned in the following manner:

1. *Sleep*: If one tends to fall asleep then the mantra repetition and the movement of the mala will become unrhythmical or will stop altogether. This will tend to bring about wakefulness and if necessary one can wash the

face with cold water. Of course, if you totally lapse into deep sleep then the breaking of the rhythm will not help. You will be dead to the world. But in this case you are probably very tired and need sleep. So there is no harm done. But the main point to remember is that the breaking of the rhythm of the mantra and the mala rotation tends to help you to be aware of sleepiness and then you can rectify the situation.

2. *Preoccupation with the outside world*: The rotation of the mala and the chanting of the mantra will quickly and automatically tend to make you introvert. This is particularly true if you chant the mantra with feeling and intensity.

3. *Absorption with the inner thought process*: The important thing is that you don't suppress the thoughts. Let them arise, but you must be aware of them. You must not be totally lost in them. Don't become identified with them. You must watch them as a witness. Japa is an excellent method of being able to watch the thoughts without becoming totally lost in them. The method is as follows. You must, in a sense, split your awareness. That is, you should simultaneously be attentive to all the continuous thoughts that arise, as well as the mantra and the rotation of the mala. Let the thoughts come, but also be aware of the practice of *japa*. If you start to become lost in your thoughts, then you will stop rotating the mala, or the rotation of the mala and the chanting of the mantra will become uncoordinated. Whatever happens, you will quickly notice this loss of awareness in the *japa* and you can then again equally split your awareness. You must keep on doing this.

Eventually, if you practise correctly and for a sufficient length of time, the thought process will tend to exhaust itself. Mental turmoil subsides. There is a gradual transference. The mind becomes overwhelmed by the repetitive mantra, instead of the bubbling thoughts. The mind automatically becomes calm and more one-pointed. Your awareness will become riveted by the mantra and the process of *japa*. This is exactly what is required. At this stage the mind will have become very relaxed, not by suppression, but by exhaustion of the surface thoughts and a gradual weaning away of one's tendency to lapse into a reverie of thoughts. This state of natural thoughtlessness combined with awareness is the prelude to meditation.

Actually the continual bubbling of the thought processes is positive, especially when they come from the deeper realms of the subconscious mind. These are your inner problems. By watching them you will remove them. But the thoughts that most people become lost in during meditative practices tend to be very superficial thoughts. These have to be gradually wiped away, through japa, so that one can see deeper. So japa initially acts to systematically wean away one's attention from these superficial thoughts, which are merely a distraction.

When your mind becomes one-pointed and you become deeply absorbed in the mantra, you may be suddenly confronted by a vision or thought that arises almost unexpectedly. This represents one of your deeper problems and it is this that needs to be removed. Mere awareness will do this. It is at this stage, where you are going below surface thoughts, that you are starting to clean out the mind.

4. *Concentration*: This will arise automatically, when you have exhausted the continuous bombardment of your thoughts through japa. That is, awareness leads to concentration of mind. When you have exhausted the disruptive thoughts of the mind then you will have no choice but to concentrate. You will be almost forced to concentrate.

Japa is a simple, yet effective method of overcoming all the pitfalls that we previously mentioned. This is why it is such a widely practised method. It provides a balance between absorption in the outside world and its opposite, total loss in the world of thoughts. It helps to bring concentration through awareness. It provides a method of calming the chatter of the mind, not by mental suppression, but by allowing the thoughts to arise, while anchoring awareness to a mantra and mala rotation. It is a very sensible, scientific method. It is a useful tool for people who don't have a concentrated mind . . . which is most people.

The mala and its use

The mala is an essential part of most of the techniques of japa. As we have already stated, it is mainly a tool to maintain awareness. It can be made of various types of material, depending on the tradition. The malas widely used in yoga are made of either sandalwood,

tulsi or rudraksha beads. The mala that most sadhakas use today for their japa is made of tulsi wood. Crystal stones can also be used among various other materials.

Malas with different numbers of beads can be used. In yoga the usual number is either 108, 54 or 27. The latter is called a *sumirani mala* and is used for japa practised during one's daily activities. We will discuss this later. The beads are generally strung on strong thread and are separated from each other by a special type of knot called a *brahma granthi* (knot of brahma).

Each mala has an extra, bead called the *sumeru* (junction or summit). This bead is offset from the main loop of the mala at the point where the two ends of the mala are joined. The bead is an essential part of the mala. It acts as a reference point, so that the practitioner can know the number of mala rotations he has made. That is, the practitioner starts the japa practice from the *sumeru* bead and proceeds to rhythmically rotate the mala, bead by bead. There is a smooth flow and rotation of the mala until the obstruction of the *sumeru*. This will immediately tell the individual that he has completed one round of the mala. It also has another use: it is easily possible, as we have already explained, to forget that one is doing japa. The mind wanders, even though the mala is being rotated. The mala is rotated automatically without awareness. When the fingers reach the offset *sumeru* bead awareness is once again returned to the practice in hand.

There is a special method of holding the mala: the mala should be held in the right hand. Support the mala by a loop formed by joining the tip of the thumb with the ring finger. The middle finger should be used to rotate the mala. The second finger and small finger should not be used but held clear of the mala.

You should count the number of times you rotate the mala. This can be done mentally or it can be done by using the left hand as follows: after one mala rotation place the left thumb on the first joint line at the base of the left little finger; after the second mala



rotation, raise the thumb to the second joint line; after the third, place the thumb on the upper line of the little finger. Then on the fourth rotation, transfer the left thumb to the first line of the ring finger. And so on. In this manner you can count twelve rotations. This allows you to direct all your awareness to the ongoing practice of japa.

Traditionally, japa is practised while holding the right hand in front of the heart. There is a lot of sense in this if you chant your mantra in rhythm with your heartbeat, and this is something that happens automatically almost without effort. Or it does if you chant a one syllable mantra such as Aum. It does not apply with polysyllable mantras. Also, holding the hand in front of the heart seems to intensify the feeling with which one chants the mantra. Feeling comes from the heart, so it is said.

If you prefer to hold your right hand in any position you can do so. The choice is yours. According to tradition, it is also said that a mala used for japa should not be worn during the day, and that when it is not being used for japa, it should be carefully wrapped in a piece of cloth. This is done to prevent any negative change in the vibrations associated with the mala. Also it is said that other people should not even see your mala. You can adhere to these rules if you wish; again the choice is up to you.

Which mantra?

There are innumerable mantras. Common ones are: *Aum, Kreem, Hreem, Shreem, Aim, Dum, Hum, Aum Namah Shivaya, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Aum Mani Padme Hum* and many more. The sound patterns of a mantra will stimulate a certain effect on the mental and psychic nature of the individual. Each mantra will tend to create (or perhaps draw out is a better term) a specific symbol within one's psyche.

Ideally the mantra should be received directly from a guru or a person with elevated awareness, for as it says in the *Kularnava Tantra*: "Only the mantra which is received from the guru will release its power." (15:19)

If you have received a mantra through initiation in this manner, then you should continue to use it in japa. It is best if you don't change it except for a very good reason. The following are the most valid reasons for changing your mantra:

1. Your guru gives you another mantra.
2. Through attaining an elevated state of awareness you realize another mantra, which is so overwhelming and compelling that you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is your mantra. This often happens and the new mantra should be adopted.
3. You receive a mantra in a dream. In this case, it is advisable to consult a guru for verification of the suitability of the mantra for your own use. It is too easy to auto-suggest oneself into dreaming up a mantra, and this is definitely not the correct mantra.

If you have not received a personal mantra from a guru, or if you have not realized your mantra in an intense flash of insight, then you should use Aum. You can also use its equivalents: Amin and Amen. It is a universal mantra and is suitable for all types of people. It is an ideal mantra for japa practice.

Don't disclose your mantra to anyone, even Aum.

The three modes of japa

There are three basic types of japa, defined as follows:

1. *Baikhari japa* (also called *vachika*) is audible or articulated japa. The mantra can be chanted as loud as you wish. This is the most suitable form of japa for beginners and those people who have a disturbed mind. In fact, when you feel depressed, tense, angry or unhappy, this is one of the most effective methods of making the mind peaceful.

Incidentally, baikhari japa is widely practised in groups throughout the world. It is very powerful. If the reader has been to an ashram and heard fifty people chanting early in the morning in a meditation hall, he will understand the power of collective chanting. The whole atmosphere is charged with positive vibrations. In some ashrams, baikhari japa is practised continuously day in, day out. Various people take it in turns to keep the japa resonating throughout the ashram. In the Sivananda Ashram, home of the Divine Life Society, the maha mantra *Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare* has been going unceasingly since 1943.

2. *Upanshu* is whispering or inarticulate japa. In this form, the lips are moved, but they create no loud external sound. Only the

practitioner can hear the mantra. This is the stage which leads from the simpler *baikhari japa* to the more subtle *manasik japa*. This mode of practice is often done by people who practise long periods of *japa* perhaps ten or twelve hours a day for a fixed period of time.

It is particularly useful in cases where one is unable to do *baikhari japa* to avoid creating disturbances in your environment, perhaps for fear of waking your sleeping children in the morning or late at night. If loud chants of *Aum* will disturb your family or neighbours then practise *upanshu japa*.

3. *Manasik* is mental *japa*. No audible sound is emitted, yet the mantra is clearly heard mentally. This is the most subtle of the three modes. It should be done when the mind is calm and reasonably free of thoughts. If you do *manasik japa* with a disturbed mind, then you are most likely to sink into a pleasant sleep, or become lost in the thought process. If practised with a calm state of mind, *manasik* is the best mode to delve deeper into the mind.

Combination of the different modes

The practitioner need not only use one mode of *japa*. He can transfer from one to the other to suit the circumstances, during each practice program. It is a good idea to always start *japa* with *baikhari*, whether your mind is calm or tense. If your mind is tense, then you should certainly chant aloud until it becomes peaceful. The loud vibrating sound, in a sense, overwhelms one's attention and gradually soothes the mind into a state of reasonable tranquillity. If you are calm then you can quickly transfer to *upanshu* or *manasik japa*. *Baikhari* is best for calming the gross tensions of the mind, and *manasik* is most suitable for exploring the deeper realms of the mind.

If you are doing *manasik japa* and the mind is wandering too much or becoming drowsy, then you should immediately transfer to *baikhari*. When you have brought the mind under some control again, then you can once more return to *manasik japa*.

As a general rule we can say the following: beginners and people with tense minds should practise mostly *baikhari* and a little *manasik*; when one makes progress in controlling the mind, then the *baikhari* should be reduced and the *manasik japa* increased.

Pronunciation and speed

The mantra should be chanted rhythmically and with clear pronunciation. It should be chanted with feeling and intensity. It should be synchronized with the rotation of the mala. This applies whether the mantra is whispered, aloud or mental. Chant quickly if the mind is disturbed, slowly if the mind is more relaxed.

Anushthana

The Sanskrit word *anushthana* means a vow to accomplish or perform a specific act. *Japa anushthana* is widely practised. It means that one resolves to do *japa* for a fixed period of time or for a specific number of mantra repetitions. Its purpose is to discipline the individual so that he actually carries out what he intends. Many people often start a project with intensity and interest, but this quickly fades away with time. As such they fail to accomplish their aim. This applies also to *japa*. The enthusiasm disappears and they don't continue to practise. So this vow is a help in over coming this lethargic tendency.

These *anushthanas* are very popular in India and are usually prescribed for people with fickle minds, which is nearly everyone. They can be practised for one day, one week, one month, one year or however long one originally chooses. The duration, however, should be realistic. One should be sincere. Traditionally *anushthana* is associated with various rules.

1. Total silence or at least a reduction in one's speaking habits.
2. Cutting off one's contact with family, friends and responsibilities.
3. Diet restrictions.

There are other rules, many of which would be impractical for the average, busy person of today.

If you really want to take up an *anushthana* seriously then we suggest you seek the advice of a competent teacher on a personal level, who can prescribe rules to suit your nature and circumstances. We do feel, however, that each person could make a vow to practise a certain amount of *yoga* every day, whether for half an hour or three hours; and to practise *karma yoga* throughout the entire day. This is not an arduous *anushthana*, but will help to ensure that you practise daily.

Concerning *japa*, you can make a resolve that you will chant your mantra a specific

number of times over a set period. For example, you could decide to chant 100,000 Aums in 50 days. To do this you would have to chant 2,000 daily. If you can chant at a rate of one Aum per second, then you can chant 60 Aums per minute; therefore, the time required to chant 2,000 Aums would be 2000/60 which is about 35 minutes daily. This of course depends on the length of your mantra, if you don't use Aum, and the speed of your chanting. Or you can make a vow to chant 1080 Aums, or any other mantra, every day. This would be 10 rotations of a 108 bead mala. Or you can vow to complete 50,000 mantras, by chanting for one hour every day for as long as is required. There are so many possibilities and combinations. You must decide on a suitable figure for yourself.

This method of anushtana is an excellent method of cleaning and calming the mind. We recommend anushtana in association with japa, but you must not think that it is absolutely essential. If you don't want to commit yourself to a vow, then you can still do japa regularly or occasionally. It will still bring benefits.

Sitting position

Any comfortable meditative sitting pose can be used for japa. Traditionally it is said that you should face north or east.

VARIATIONS OF JAPA

There are a vast number of variations of japa. We don't intend to give all of them, merely a representative few which we consider particularly useful and effective. The methods need little explanation for they are very simple and we have already described many essential details.

Method 1: vak shuddhi

Take your sitting position.

Keep your spine and head erect, but without strain.

Be aware of your body; feel how steady and relaxed it is.

Do not be in a hurry.

Try to imagine that you are free from worries, or at least they can be held in abeyance for the duration of the practice.

Then begin to repeat your mantra and rotate your mala, starting from the sumeru bead.

Move each bead in turn so that it is synchronized with the mantra repetition.

Be aware of the mantra and the rotation of the mala, while simultaneously watching the thoughts that arise.

Don't reject any thoughts; let them arise, but be aware.

All you have to do is watch the process of the mind while simultaneously keeping in touch with the practice of japa, the mantra and the mala movement.

The same applies to outside disturbances; be aware of them, but maintain awareness of the mantra and mala.

Continue in this way until you return to the sumeru bead.

Don't cross the sumeru, but reverse the direction by turning the mala through 180 degrees with your fingers.

Continue the practice.

Many ideas or distractions will arise; let them for this is the nature of the tempestuous mind. Simply remain a witness.

After some time the thoughts will slowly reduce.

Your concentration will automatically increase.

If you go deeper visions may appear.

Be aware of these.

Let them arise, but observe them.

Continue in this manner for the time that you have assigned to the practice.

Make sure that you keep count of the number of mala rotations.

At the end, watch chidakasha for a short time².

Method 2: pulse japa

There are various types of pulse japa. It is to be done in association with manasik (mental) japa. The method is basically the same as method 1, except that the mantra and mala rotation are synchronized with the pulse or heartbeat.

The most useful places to feel the pulse are:

1. the eyebrow centre
2. the heart
3. the throat
4. the navel

You can choose any other place, but it should be a place where the pulse beat is clearly felt.

We especially recommend awareness of the pulse with manasik japa, after a duration of baikhari japa. This seems to intensify the clarity of the pulse. We especially recommend awareness of the eyebrow centre (*trikuti japa*).

Awareness

Awareness should be on the mantra, mala and the activities of the mind. Also be aware of the pulse if you practise method 2.

When and where to practice

You can practise japa at any time and in any place. However, in order to discipline the mind, it is best to practise at a regular time every day. The best times are early morning and evening before sleep.

Japa can also be done as a preparatory practice before doing other meditation techniques. This will calm the mind so that one gains the most out of the concluding practice.

Benefits

Japa gives the same benefits as all other meditative practices. It calms the turbulent mind and helps to expel complexes, neuroses, etc. It does this slowly without disrupting one's life. Japa charges the mind with positive sound vibrations and this is wonderful therapy for even the most disturbed mind. It brings about one-pointedness of mind, without resorting to forced concentration. It helps to release the incredible dormant faculties and power that is the inheritance of us all. Finally it leads to meditation.

General rules and suggestions

For clarity, we will summarize the basic points on japa that we have already discussed:

- Use a mantra that has been given by your guru. If you have no personal mantra, use the universal mantra Aum.
- Rotate your mala with your middle finger, using the thumb and ring finger for support. Use your right hand.
- Don't cross the sumeru bead while rotating the beads; turn the mala so that it is rotated in the opposite direction.
- Relax your mind and body but don't sleep.
- Don't concentrate. Be aware. In concentration one withdraws the attention from all sides to one point. In awareness, one pays attention not only to that one point, but to all the thoughts that arise. One does not wrestle with the mind, but slowly tames it by being a witness to all activity.

If necessary, alternate your practice between baikhari, upanshu and manasik japa. If the mind is disturbed stick to baikhari; if

the mind is calm do manasik. If the mind wanders too much while doing manasik, then change to baikhari.

- Pronounce your mantra clearly and rhythmically. If your mind starts to wander then the speed can be increased.
- Don't disclose your mantra to anyone.
- Try to practise japa regularly in accordance with an anushtana.
- Reflect on the meaning of the mantra whenever you have time to spare.

Notes

¹ For details on the subject of awareness refer to Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

If you have been practising surya namaskara regularly you should be able to perform the whole movement without the slightest hesitation.¹ To this dynamic exercise you can now add the associated mantras, if you have not already done so. These will transform the entire practice and make it far more powerful.

Try moola shodhana. Overcome your trepidation and test it. If we did not think that it is a useful practice then we would not have discussed it at such length. It is a practice that everyone can do physically; it is only mental disinclination that stops most people from trying it. If you suffer from constipation, then you should definitely practise it regularly.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	5
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with		
Jalandhara Bandha	—	20
Aum chanting	—	10
Japa	—	30
Chidakasha Dharana	—	15
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Ushtrasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with		
Jalandhara Bandha	—	20
Aum chanting	—	4
Japa	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Yoga Mudrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with		
Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
Japa	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		60

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

Lesson 15

Once a wandering sannyasin (parivrajaka) entered a village and a pious Brahmin called out to him: "Swamiji, please take bhiksha (food) at my home." The sannyasin did so and after the meal, the Brahmin begged that he be given diksha (initiation). The sannyasin told him to wait some time and continued on his way. After some years the sannyasin again came to the village. The Brahmin was very pleased and again invited him to take food. He did so, and after the meal the Brahmin again asked for diksha. Again the sannyasin replied, "Don't be in a hurry; continue your karma yoga," and went on his way.

Many years passed, then again the sannyasin came to the same village. The Brahmin was overwhelmed. He thought that this time he would definitely get diksha. After the usual meal he raised the matter again, and again the sannyasin told him to wait. This time the

Brahmin became very angry and wanted to know the reason for the delay.

The following day the sannyasin came again to the Brahmin's house for bhiksha but as he was about to place the food in the bowl he noticed something that looked like urine in the vessel. He said: "Swamiji, I can't put food in your bowl, there appears to be urine in it." "What if there is?" replied the sannyasin. "But if I do that it will be polluted, useless!" "Similar is the state of your mind," explained the sannyasin. "While it remains even a little unclean my diksha will be of no value."

Some disciples, even though they may be initiated, cannot proceed on the spiritual path or gain spiritual experiences, for the same reason. They blame their guru, yet it is only because of their unfit state that no progress is made. When the mind is cleansed and pure, then progress is assured.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Bhakti Yoga (Part 1)

Bhakti yoga is the yoga of love and devotion. It is devotion to the divine, in whatever form, or non-form you care to see him (or her). It can be devotion to truth, God, the supreme, Brahman, the absolute reality or any other name that you want to call the ineffable. It can be devotion to Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman, Mahavira, Shakti, Shiva, Vishnu, Kali, Durga, Ahura Mazda or even Zeus if you wish. You can express devotion to any form which you regard as divinity incarnated. It can be a great saint, whether dead or alive. It can be your guru. The specific form is unimportant . . . it is the devotion that you personally feel that is essential. Without this devotion, whether great or small, it is impossible to practise bhakti yoga.

Bhakti can easily be labelled blind dogma and in many cases it has degenerated into exactly this. In the past and in the present day, bhakti has been totally misunderstood and misused. This has led to fanaticism and intolerance. This is not what bhakti is all about. Bhakti is not something that is easily acceptable to the modern intellectual world. This is a great pity, for bhakti yoga is an incredibly powerful method that can lead to higher knowledge and transcendence. Not only this, bhakti yoga can help you to harmonize your life and make life the joy that it should be. People have seen the misuse and corruption of bhakti and have mistaken this for the essence of bhakti yoga. Bhakti yoga has vast implications which can transform your life. This topic has been written in an attempt to remove the cobwebs of misconceptions and to show you how bhakti yoga can transform your life. It will be quite a lengthy discussion.

If you are sceptical, there is nothing wrong with this; we don't ask you to believe anything that we write with blind acceptance. Why should you? All we ask is that you read these pages with a reasonably open mind, always remembering that there are far greater

implications behind the path of bhakti yoga than one can imagine. Another thing to remember is that many people would have once laughed and walked away from a person talking about bhakti. But it is amazing how we change, but the change does not come through mere blind acceptance, but through greater understanding and realization of the deeper significance of bhakti yoga.

Another thing to remember is that many great yogis, if not all, expressed bhakti. This was either their path or bhakti came as a result of other paths. Some of them could not stop talking about bhakti. Were they misguided? This is most unlikely, since these were the very people who were regarded by others as wise men. If wisdom can lead to bhakti, or if bhakti can lead to wisdom, then there must be something behind the path of bhakti that is not immediately obvious. Furthermore, these great yogis were clear indicators and examples of what the path of bhakti brings: tolerance, peace, understanding, love of fellow man and many other attributes. It is to these people that you should look if you want to see clear proof of the benefits of bhakti yoga, not those who become bigots and fanatics.

What is bhakti?

The word *bhakti* comes from the root *bhaja*, which means 'to adore', 'serve', 'love', 'to be devoted'. And this is exactly what bhakti yoga is all about. It is the path of devotion. The word *bhakta* comes from the same root and means 'a person who practises bhakti yoga, who feels devotion'.

Bhakti yoga implies two things: both the path and the experience. A person can be on the path of bhakti yoga and yet have no positive experience of intense bhakti. At the same time, a person can experience intense bhakti, and yet not profess to be on the path of bhakti yoga. Let us illustrate this more clearly by taking two examples:

1. If one is devotionally inclined, then one can follow the path of bhakti yoga. This involves intense concentration of one's entire being on an object of devotion. This method of bhakti yoga can eventually lead to a transcendental experience of overwhelming bhakti. Associated with this bhakti is transcendental knowledge. This bhakti will become stronger and stronger with time and more experience.
2. If one is not devotionally inclined, then the other paths of yoga can be followed instead. These other paths will eventually lead to spiritual experience. This in turn will automatically lead to bhakti, for you will realize something that you did not know before. Whichever method you adopt, the result is the same. The paths of the devotional and the non-devotional individuals will eventually join.

Bhakti is both the means and the expression of higher awareness. It is both the practice and the spontaneous expression of higher knowledge. One leads to the other. Until a certain point on the path of bhakti yoga, there is more faith than experience, but once one has had a definite experience then the whole situation changes. One comes to know that there is indeed a direction to one's aspirations and practices. Bhakti becomes an experience. From then onwards, one knows that one is not chasing a mirage like a man in the desert.

This bhakti increases . . . increases . . . and goes on increasing.

This bhakti spans the infinite chasm between mere faith and divine realization. And it also covers the period when the bhakta attempts to live and express this realization in everyday life. Bhakti bridges the abyss between lack of divine knowledge backed by faith, and the personal experience and knowledge of divinity. Bhakti is not a subject for discussion. It must be felt, known and experienced for oneself. Real bhakti arises spontaneously through higher awareness and knowledge, because of realization of something not known before. Bhakti is the expression and experience of joy at realizing the impossible, at being confronted with direct perception of that which is beyond words. Bhakti, real bhakti that is, cannot be created artificially, for it is an expression of bliss, of something beyond the wildest flights of the imagination.

The mechanics of bhakti

The purpose of bhakti is to develop intense concentration towards one object. This occurs spontaneously if there is a feeling of bhakti towards that object. All one's energy is focussed in one direction. This in turn leads to higher sensitivity and receptivity of the mind-body to higher forces. One becomes a bhakta through experience and not merely through belief.

This method of bhakti has been used by many religions, notably Christianity and Hinduism. In these religions, the whole purpose is to encourage the expression of bhakti in the followers. To do this, specific figures are given as objects of adoration. If this adoration is sufficient, then one can know intense bhakti, bliss and transcendental experience. The method is very powerful, and has led many people to the highest states of awareness. But there has to be strong devotion to obtain the final results.

All of these bhakti religions have used the same method. They have only differed in the specific form (or forms) to which the followers are recommended to devote themselves. The basic mechanics are the same in all cases. They have all used bhakti yoga as a powerful means to transcendence.

The method and purpose of bhakti yoga is to take you away from identification with the little 'I', the body-mind. The aim is to reduce personal whims, conflicts, disharmony, etc., which tend to imprison and severely limit awareness. The aim is to make the mind a perfect reflector, a perfect mirror of experience. It is under these circumstances that one can know higher awareness and bliss.

Bhakti – balance for the intellect

The intellect is a severely limited form of gaining knowledge yet it is the power of the intellect that the modern world seems to most admire. There is nothing wrong with this, providing one can understand its limitations. And it is this that most people don't appreciate. In fact, this will never be appreciated until one experiences something way beyond the intellect, which clearly shows the insignificance of logical thinking as a means to knowledge.

Bhakti is an excellent method of providing a balance to over-rigid attachment to the intellect. It is a great help in removing intellectual constipation and is a means of

giving direction and release to emotions and feelings. One of the biggest problems in the modern world is the inability for intellectual people to express emotions. These emotions become pent-up and suppressed. People forget how to laugh and release their emotions in a positive and non-destructive manner. Emotions are often expressed in outbursts and violence. The path of bhakti provides a perfect method of expressing these unruly emotions. Furthermore, the emotions are not only released, they are channelled towards making the mind one-pointed. This is a positive utilization of emotional forces. The emotions are directed towards the goal of higher awareness and experience.

The emotions are such a powerful force in human beings. Most people are completely ruled by them. They are buffeted to and fro according to the dictates and whims of their emotions. If these emotions can be channelled and concentrated, then one's whole being will also be channelled and concentrated. It is impossible to calm the mind if the emotions are turbulent. It is like trying to calm the sea when there is a typhoon or hurricane in the area. But if you can calm the mind, the typhoon, then the sea will automatically become much calmer. So it is with the emotions: harmonize them and one's whole being will automatically follow suit. This is the boon of bhakti yoga.

Not everyone is devotionally inclined

Those people who don't feel any form of devotion to any deity or to any person, do not need to cultivate devotion or belief. Why force or artificially create belief or devotion without substance? You would merely be fooling yourself, and it is not necessary. All you must do is to practise other forms of yoga with intensity. Eventually bhakti will arise spontaneously as a consequence of higher awareness and experience. Eventually you will have no choice but to be a bhakta (devotee) because of what you know. It must happen, just as surely as night follows day. This applies to everyone without exception. It applies to those people who at present feel not even the slightest sign of emotion. They will become bhaktas in time, for bhakti is an expression of indescribable bliss, joy and knowledge.

Therefore, if you don't feel devotional, don't practise bhakti yoga at the moment. Practise

other forms of yoga and eventually you will have no choice but to become a bhakta.

Those people, however, who have some form of devotion or belief should definitely follow the path of bhakti because of their very personality. They may lack any form of higher experience, but they spontaneously feel devotion towards something. If you are one of these people then you should direct your emotion towards the object of devotion. For you bhakti yoga can be the express train to expanded awareness. But make sure that you are honest with yourself. If you have to sit down and think what shall I be devoted to, then this is a sure sign that you don't really have an object of devotion. You should not need to sit down and ask yourself the question. If you feel devotion for something, then you will know. There will be no doubt – your heart will immediately tell you the object which captivates your bhakti. If you feel strong devotion to one thing, without doubt, bhakti is the path for you. If you don't feel this overwhelming devotion for something, then at this stage bhakti is not for you. Under these circumstances, bhakti yoga will probably lead to mere ritual and self-deception, rather than transcendence. Practise other types of yoga and bhakti will come in the future.

Bhakti combined with karma yoga

Karma yoga can be practised as an entirely separate path of yoga. It is not necessary to practise karma yoga with a feeling of devotion¹. But if you combine karma yoga with bhakti yoga, then the whole process becomes intensified; it becomes supercharged. Karma yoga alone is a powerful sadhana, but bhakti stimulates and accelerates the whole process. This is the main teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*.

If you are already devotionally inclined, then you should definitely combine karma yoga and bhakti yoga. What better way is there to worship, to express bhakti than through your work? It is also a very productive form of worship that contributes directly to others.

The essence of karma yoga is awareness, detachment and renunciation of the fruits of actions¹. When bhakti and karma yoga are combined, it becomes almost easy to renounce attachment to the fruits or rewards of one's actions. One merely sacrifices all actions and endeavours to the object of bhakti, whether it

is the supreme, the guru or whatever. Actions, food, thoughts, objects, pleasures, etc. are all done for something outside yourself. All rewards, praise and fruits of one's work are dedicated to the object of devotion. Though one may enjoy or use the fruits, they are not done specifically for oneself, but as an act of bhakti. This is the way to rapidly harmonize the mind and reduce egoism.

This attitude of devotion also brings about detachment, for actions are not done for oneself, but for something outside one's individuality. The more the surrender of one's actions, the greater will be the detachment. One will cease to be swayed or upset by the ups and downs of life. One will do one's best in work and life, but there will be less buffeting. This is particularly powerful if you adopt the following attitude: "I do not serve . . . the Supreme alone serves." When you feel that you are not really acting but the tool, the instrument of something far greater, then you must become detached, and because of this you work much better and more effectively¹.

This feeling of non-doership has been summed up in the following quotations: "Think that you are not you; that you do not exist. Think that it is that power which works in all things, also working through you. Practice will eventually reveal this secret to you."

Also: "One must realize through experience that it is He who makes us do everything. Never believe that you are the doer; you will gradually realize this through experience of the doer."

"Always cherish the thought that you are nobody. Whatever there is, it is only the power . . . you are only the medium." This attitude may be merely intellectual in the beginning, but eventually you will discover through experience that it is a sublime truth. Whether you feel this non-doing through the intellect or through personal experience, it leads directly to detachment. One becomes detached in all situations of life. This is the means to harmony, happiness and higher experience.

What about awareness? This is the other vital aspect of karma yoga. How does bhakti relate to increasing awareness? We have partly covered this in the subject of detachment, for the attitude of not being the doer automatically increases awareness. But there is another factor

in bhakti yoga which intensifies awareness – this is remembrance. Most people are unaware because of sleepiness or forgetfulness. If you feel devotion towards something then you are more likely to remember. You are more likely to be awake. And certainly you are more likely to be aware. So a bhakta who remembers his guru, or personal form of the supreme, or whatever, is automatically more aware in all situations in life. This applies to work and karma yoga. The greater the devotion, the greater the awareness.

In the *Uddhava Gita*, Krishna said: "Surrender all fruits of actions to me and maintain ceaseless remembrance of me . . ." There is an old saying: "It's not what you do but the way that you do it." This applies exactly to bhakti and karma yoga. It does not matter whether a bhakta is rich or poor. A poor person can offer even the meanest object as devotion, yet if this is given with total feeling and sincerity, then it is far better than a rich man who gives vast wealth, but without the slightest devotion. It is the same with all acts and work. It is not the acts in themselves that are important, it is the feeling and sincerity behind them.

You can work and play in any way that comes naturally, but always remember your mantra, your guru or your personal deity or whatever. And it is *bhava* that is the keyword. This means intense feeling of devotion. It is this that can supercharge karma yoga and transform your life.

Bhakti and the other yogic paths

We have discussed bhakti yoga integrated with karma yoga. Now we will briefly discuss the other paths in relation to bhakti yoga.

Firstly we want to emphasize one more time that all the paths of yoga lead to the same experience. The realization is the same; it is only the means that are different. All the paths of yoga aim at reducing and eventually eliminating the compulsive grip of the mind-born ego. Bhakti does this by identifying and relegating all one's impulses towards an outside object of bhakti. Eventually one surrenders the ego to the guru, the supreme or whatever. This is not easy, but this is the aim. Jnana yoga on the other hand, attains the same result by intuitive realization that the ego is not the totality of our being. This automatically reduces the hold of the ego and

eventually dissolves it². Karma yoga attains the same end when one ceases to be the doer. Raja yoga reduces the power of the ego by exploring the mind. This leads to understanding of the vast underlying substratum of each human being and every manifested object. The ego automatically drops away when one starts to know the nature of the mind.

All the paths merge with each other, for they are like different petals on the same flower. Jnana (revelatory knowledge) leads to bhakti and bhakti leads to jnana. Karma yoga leads to bhakti and vice versa. In the beginning however, the aspirant must tread that path (or paths) that suits his or her temperament. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says: "I welcome all men, no matter how they approach me. Men pursue me from every direction, O Partha." (4:2)

Some people say that bhakti yoga is the quickest and the best path. Well, this may be true if you are devotionally inclined, but if you are not, then it is not the quickest path. If you are more inclined to actions or to thought, then other paths are probably more suitable at present. Bhakti is powerful, no doubt, but only if you automatically and naturally feel devotion. Eventually, bhakti will arise, for it is inherent in everyone. Each path is powerful if practised and if it suits the personality of the aspirant.

Deeper knowledge of existence does not arise separately from bhakti or devotion. They arise simultaneously. As one gains more knowledge, so bhakti increases. As both knowledge and bhakti increase, so actions become more incisive, powerful and efficient. This is karma yoga. Also as these other attributes arise, so one is more able to explore and know the mind (raja yoga). These are all interrelated. As all these things increase, so does the experience of beatitude; one becomes enveloped in a cloud of intoxicating bliss. This is the wine of the tantras and the soma of the Vedas. It is the nectar . . . the amrit . . . the divine fragrance. Therefore, remember these paths are not rigidly separated, they are all intimately connected.

They show that bhakti (devotion) and jnana (knowledge) are not really very different; various sages have cleverly defined them. For example, in the *Viveka Chudamani* by Shankaracharya it says: "Among things conducive to liberation, bhakti is most important. Seeking

after one's real nature is one definition of bhakti yoga. Enquiry into the truth of one's being is devotion . . ." (verses 31, 32)

The focal point of devotion

You can devote yourself to anything. But it must be something for which you spontaneously feel bhakti, love or devotion. The object is a means to an end. The object should not be imposed on your character. It should not be foreign or unnatural to your personality. It should be something for which devotion arises spontaneously. This is so important; but it can be anything. In the *Uddhava Gita*, a section of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, it says: "The Supreme can be worshipped in whatever image or medium for which the worshipper feels reverence and devotion, for being the soul of the universe, I (Krishna) dwell in all things."

You can choose anything, for whatever you worship is a form of the supreme. In the case of devotees of Krishna, he represents, symbolizes and is everything. He is the essence of all things. Though he is usually depicted in human form, playing a flute and with a peacock feather in his hair, he can actually be represented by any form, any object. The well known form of Krishna is highly venerated by large numbers of people in India. Many people feel overwhelming bhakti for this human form of Krishna. He captivates their hearts and all their aspirations. And this is wonderful, for it can easily lead to higher experience and expanded awareness. But Krishna is not restricted to this form. He can be anything. It is the focus of attention that is important. If you feel devotion for one particular form then use it as a means of expressing bhakti.

In Christianity, the focal point of bhakti is Christ or the Virgin Mary. These can also lead to transcendence if the bhakti is great enough. In fact, this is the method that many great Christian saints have used in order to know the unspeakable. Saints like St. Bernard, St. Teresa, St. Francis and so forth were all bhaktas. They all used their love of Christ as a means to deeper understanding of existence. In this way, they harmonized their whole being. From this arose cosmic understanding and bhakti.

In tantra, there are vast numbers of forms of Shakti, the cosmic mother. They all represent the various aspects of existence. They all represent the absolute. It does not matter

whether it is Kali, Durga, Chhinnamasta, Tripurasundari, Saraswati, Dumavati, Shodashi, Bhuvaneshwari, Annapurna, or any of the hundreds of other traditional forms of Shakti. If you feel bhakti to one of these forms, and many people do in India, then you should direct your emotional and mental energy towards it. This will channelize all the forces of your being.

Incidentally this is why the spiritual climate of India is so extraordinary. There are countless numbers of different deities, all of which are perfectly acceptable as a focal point of bhakti. Such is the tolerance and freedom of worship. The worship of the supreme can be directed towards anything. Why not? All these different images act as a centre through which one can expand awareness. But there must be compelling devotion. There must be attraction towards a particular form. Without this, there cannot be bhakti.

Even certain systems of Buddhism use deities as a means to higher awareness. Actually, Buddha was against the use of deities, for he knew that they could so easily lead to superstition, ignorance and dogma. This is partly true, and was certainly the case in Buddha's time when religion had totally degenerated into mere ritual without meaning, purpose and understanding. But this will not occur if one keeps in mind the purpose of bhakti and is tolerant of other forms of worship. Bhakti can lead to expanded awareness. Many Buddhists after the death of Buddha realized that there was justification for the use of deities. Because of this, many deities were introduced into such sects as Tibetan Buddhism – Amogh Siddhi, Tara, Avaloketeshwara and others. These represent different aspects of existence and states of awareness. They can be used as objects of bhakti. They can invoke power well beyond their material form.

In Islam, Mohammed discouraged the worship of images of the supreme for the same reason as Buddha, because among superstitious people it can so easily lead to mere idolatry. This again was certainly true when Mohammed was alive. People worshipped idols in a blind fashion. Rituals were performed in mere lip language without any real feeling, which led to ignorance, exactly the opposite purpose of worship and bhakti. There has to be an attitude of understanding.

Islam, however, is a bhakti religion. The bhakti is directed towards Allah, the all embracing Lord. He is worshipped as an abstraction.

What we have said about Islam also applies to Judaism: the bhakti is directed to a nebulous or formless form of the supreme. So, you can use a specific form as a focus of devotion, or you can use an abstraction. It does not really matter. The important thing if you feel some type of bhakti is that you express it and channel it in one direction towards the form, or non-form of the supreme.

You can express bhakti towards anything . . . Krishna, Christ, Rama . . . anything that spontaneously creates a feeling of devotion from your heart. You can use a symbol such as Aum or the cross. You can use a mantra; in fact this is an excellent method, especially if you are attracted by the specific sound of a mantra and that which it represents. You can express bhakti towards a great saint, or yogi or a sage, and best of all towards a guru. A guru will not only act as a focal point of bhakti, he will also inspire you in your practices and give direct guidance. This is the personal grace of the guru.

The object of devotion should be something that attracts you as a lamp attracts moths. It should be something that you cannot stop thinking about. It should be something that you can relate to, identify with. The aim is that the object of bhakti overwhelms your whole attention. If there is something or someone who acts as a magnet for your bhakti, then adopt this as your object of devotion.

This bhakti towards a particular form leads to other things which transcend the external nature of the object. With experience, your bhakti will transform itself so that it encompasses more and more. Eventually, there is no need to confine oneself to devotion of a limited figure, because a feeling of devotion or veneration for everything develops. But this must arise spontaneously; there is no need to cultivate any feelings. It should arise naturally from the very depths of your being.

The form of the supreme

People often say: "How can Krishna, Rama, Christ, etc. possibly be the supreme? Why should we worship the supreme in a limited form?" But this misses the whole point of

worship and bhakti. If the supreme, the absolute is everywhere in everything, then why not also in the form of Krishna or Christ? It does not matter whether it is Krishna or Christ, or whether it is Krishna or Christ! There is no difference. It does not matter what form you choose. Furthermore, this worship or bhakti to a specific form, this personalization of the supreme, is a means for you to know the higher experience for yourself. Everything and anything is simultaneously the absolute and not the absolute. This seems a contradiction in logical terms, and it is. But you must understand the implications behind this statement for yourself. Forms or deities such as Krishna and Christ are both the supreme and not the supreme. It depends entirely on one's level of awareness. The important thing, however, is that anything for which you feel overwhelming, intense bhakti can be the means to go beyond the normal, mundane levels of awareness and experience.

They say that Krishna, Christ, Rama, etc. are avatars (divine incarnations), but actually everything and everyone in the universe is a divine incarnation. You are yourself a divine incarnation, but probably don't know it. The idea and aim is to go beyond the limitations of one's individual self and to know the transcendental nature of one's real self.

Therefore, the best advice we can give here is that you discard all rational, intellectual thought and discussions about the validity of worshipping a certain form of incarnation of divinity. The answer to the question is way beyond the intellect – the answer is transcendental. All you have to do is to express and channel bhakti to any form that comes naturally to your personality. The answer will come in time. All doubts will be dispelled. You will in time, realize the real, ineffable, unspeakable nature and purposes of worshipping a specific form.

Scientifically, this idea of the unlimited in the limited or the infinite in the finite is not new. Let us give an example. Scientists have been amazed at the implications behind research into the nature of the DNA molecule. If you have forgotten what the DNA molecule³ is, it is the so-called molecule of life. It is the molecule of incredible complexity, which moulds individual characteristics in human beings. It is the blueprint of hair colour,

size of feet, height and all other features of each person. It determines the pattern of growth from childhood to adulthood. It is the molecule that fixes our mode of life and we have to follow its dictates on a physical level. But there is much more. Scientists are beginning to tell us, with the awe of mystics, that this molecule contains the entire knowledge of our evolutionary past. It contains the collective unconscious of the human race. It contains the memory of events that occurred thousands and millions of years ago. It contains the entire history of existence. The scientists probably find it hard to believe the facts for themselves, but they are forced to this conclusion through experience and research. It is something that the conditioned mind cannot easily accept or grasp.

So science is looking and pointing in the same direction as yoga and religions. Science is also starting to revise its attitude towards atoms. Many top scientists have already discarded the mechanical model of the 'simple' atom. They no longer regard an atom as merely a collection of electrons buzzing and whirling around a central nucleus. This may be a reasonable picture, but tests and experiments indicate beyond doubt that the nature of the atom is much more than the mechanical model. There is a substratum, an essence that lies hidden behind each and every atom. Each atom seems to be like a whirlpool a centre where cosmic forces are focussed. So where will this type of thinking and such discoveries take us? Possibly to the point where yoga and science hold each other's hand and realize that they are basically talking about the same thing.

What we are trying to point out is that each particle in the universe is connected to the infinite. Therefore, is it inconceivable that any point, any object, any focus, any deity can lead us to transcendental experience? You must answer this question for yourself through personal experience, but this in a sense gives scientific validity to the idea and method of bhakti yoga. One concentrates on a specific point. This leads to the beyond. Devotion of one's mental and emotional powers to a limited object can lead to transcendence. If you are scientifically inclined and you are following modern discoveries, then you should be able to see a glimmer of sense in the idea of attaining the infinite through the finite.

The explanation we have given is not intended to explain the power of bhakti. There is far more behind experiencing the transcendental by means of the finite, than can be explained in current scientific terminology. But what we have tried to do is to show that the worship of a finite object or deity is not totally alien to science. If science can tell us that each and every DNA molecule contains the immeasurable collective unconscious, then is it absurd, to suggest that bhakti or devotion to an object can also lead directly to the awareness of the infinite consciousness?

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna says: "A bhakta can worship me in any form; whatever form he chooses, I will justify and accept his bhakti." This sums up the whole subject. Follow your own feelings of devotion, if you have them.

Don't feel obliged to worship only traditional forms. You can choose aspects of nature if you wish, as did so many poets such as Wordsworth. Worship can be in so many different ways. The great scientist George Washington Carver expressed his bhakti when he said: "When I touch that flower I am touching infinity. It existed before there were human beings on this earth and will continue in the millions of years to come. Through that flower, I talk to the infinite which is only a silent force."

Love of everything

Needless to say, it is not easy to love and feel bhakti towards everything. In fact, it cannot arise until one wallows in states of higher awareness. When one is in perfect tune with the infinite, whether for a second or a lifetime, then one spontaneously feels love for everything without exception or stipulation.

At the same time, it is a very useful practice in bhakti yoga to superimpose divinity in any form that you conceive, whether tangible or intangible, on everything that you see in the world. That is, you can try to worship everything, seeing all as a manifestation of divinity. That is, if you are a devotee of Krishna, then you can try to see Krishna, in form or essence, in everything. At first this attitude and feeling is more intellectual than anything else. But with practice, bhakti will arise automatically in the light of personal experience. Then you will truly see divinity in everything not through faith or belief, but through personal knowledge and experience.

One should try to see divinity in everyone no matter what their faults and propensities. In the *Uddhava Gita* it says: "One should treat all others with respect and honour, in the same way that one shows devotion to the supreme (here in the form of Krishna). This leads to freedom from hatred, envy, malice, self-conceit." This is not easy to put into practice without a definite transcendental experience. But if you do this, even to a small degree, then your mind will become more and more relaxed. Moreover, it will also be wide awake and alert because of the remembrance. This is a rapid means to meditation.

The *Uddhava Gita* continues: "... Believing the Lord to be in all things, he (the bhakta) should worship all things, whether a pariah, dog, or a donkey until he experiences the real meaning of divinity in all things." This can lead to the experience of the great Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore when he wrote: "The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle of birth and death, in ebb and flow. I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this word of life. And my pride is from the life throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment."

The aim is to see the supreme divinity in every face, to worship everyone and everything, because everything is indeed divine. But you should feel bhakti towards things not because they are different, but because everything is in fact the essence of yourself.

It is when you start to feel this bhakti towards everything that you start to harmonize with others and with yourself. It is under these circumstances that you will gain happiness from the happiness of others. There is a saying that goes something like: "to find joy in another's joy, is the secret of happiness." It doesn't mean that you have to walk around joking and laughing with everyone. This is more likely to be show and falsity than anything else. It means living your life, but being tolerant of others, trying to understand others, trying to increase the happiness level of those people that you meet if it is possible.

A man's life has meaning when a little more love and light comes into the world through his efforts. This bhakti towards fellow beings was expressed powerfully by St. Francis of Assisi when he wrote the following poem:

*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, let me sow pardon.
Where there is doubt, to sow faith.
Where there is despair, to sow light.
And where there is sadness, let me sow joy.
Oh, Divine Master, grant that
I may not so much seek to be consoled,
As to console.
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying (to the ego) that we are
born to eternal life (expanded awareness).*

This is the way to reduce the fetters of selfishness. It is also the way to make the mind more receptive to higher experience.

There is a state of bhakti called *madhura* (divine sweetness). This is love of the divine in everything. One sees beauty and perfection everywhere. Wherever one looks one sees the form of the divine. There is love for everything. One looks outwards and only sees the work and essence of the supreme. This is an intoxication of bliss. One becomes saturated with bliss, for there is nothing that is not the supreme essence. It can be compared to the love that a man feels towards a woman, his beloved; or the love a woman shows towards her beloved. But this love is directed towards everything, yet, and this is the strange thing, it is simultaneously love that is non-directional; it is merely love and bliss in itself. It is not directed towards anything in particular, for this implies separateness and difference. It is both love for everything and love for nothing specifically.

In India, there are wonderful devotional songs which try to depict this indescribable state of all-encompassing bhakti. The great bhakta Tukaram wrote a song, one among many, called *Virat Bandana* in the Maharashtrian language of West India. The rough translation of the title is 'world prayer'. The first verse is as follows:

*In every place are you,
In every shape are you.
Your names are many,
But you are really only one.
Your playground is this visible universe.
In all this play, in all this carnival,
There is verily only you.*

There is another beautiful Sanskrit song called *Shyam Ki Madhuri*, which means the 'sweetness of the supreme'. It is a song that names all things of the world as being the essence of sweetness of the supreme. The song expresses the feeling of the person who feels *madhura bhakti* – divine love of everything.

Bhakti is like being in love with everything continuously, from humans, to the birds, the flowers . . . everything. You have no choice, for you realize their real nature and the nature of yourself and with this 'impossible' relationship, how is it possible not to feel love for everything? When you gain a peep, a glimpse of the essence of everything, the essence that is normally hidden from the eyes of most people, bhakti must result. Find out your real nature and the nature of everything and you will feel bhakti. You will never be the same person again.

But this state comes only when one has the grace of expanded awareness. Once you have had a taste of the divine kiss from the lips of the beloved, then you will feel unquenchable thirst and aspiration for the supreme consciousness. The bhakta will chase and worship the supreme like a madman. One will forget everything except the divine. One divine kiss and one's whole life is transformed.

Notes

¹ This has previously been explained in Karma Yoga, Part 1 and 2: Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1

² Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

³ For further details on the DNA molecule refer to 'Meditation and the Mind': Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 2

Amaroli

In this topic we intend to describe various aspects of *amaroli*, or urine therapy. Many people have actually used urine as a means of removing certain ailments. We have read of almost miraculous cures of chronic diseases attributed solely to *amaroli*. We cannot vouch for the cure of leprosy, cancer, etc. through *amaroli*, for we lack the actual experience, but at the same time we are prepared to keep an open mind on the subject. We will present the facts as we see them, so that you can decide for yourself whether *amaroli* is valid or not.

The wisdom of the ancients

Many ancient and tested traditional systems have praised the benefits of *amaroli*. In tantra there is one whole text devoted to it. The text is called the *Damara Tantra* and the process is called *shivambu kalpa vidhi*. The word *shivambu* has various meanings; in this context, it means 'urine'; the word *kalpa* here means 'to change', or 'to revitalize' and *vidhi* means 'process' or 'technique'. Therefore, *shivambu kalpa vidhi* can be translated as 'the practice of using urine to regenerate the body'.

There are 108 verses devoted entirely to *amaroli*. It is suggested that the urine be either taken alone or with various types of herbs. If you wish to find out more you should read the text yourself. We will quote three verses that summarize the whole process:

"A sensible man gets up early in the morning when three quarters of the night has passed (about 3 or 4 o'clock) faces the east and passes urine." (verse 6)

"The initial and concluding flow of urine is to be discarded. The intermediate flow is to be consumed. This is the most suitable method." (verse 7)

"One should take one's own urine. The mouth and tail of a snake contain poison. In the same way, the first and last portion of flow tend to be unwholesome. This is widely accepted." (verse 8)

The whole process is solemnly explained to Parvati by her husband Lord Shiva.

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, a traditional tantric yogic text, it says: "The first and last portion of *shivambu* (urine), which is pungent, should not be taken. The intermediate flow should be consumed daily. This is called *amaroli* according to the *Khandakapalika*."

There are many more ancient references. *Amaroli* is widely mentioned in ayurvedic texts such as the *Susruta*. So there is nothing new about drinking urine.

Is urine a poison?

One of the prime functions of the kidneys is to maintain the fluid balance of the body. That is, the body must be kept at a reasonably fixed level of alkalinity (ph); to do this the kidneys remove acid from the body. This occurs especially after meals. Associated with this elimination are various other constituents, one of which is ammonia. It is this ammonia that some people would object to, as it is poisonous in certain quantities. However, in the amounts that the body produces, especially from a vegetarian low-protein diet, it is not a problem.

Contents of urine

Urine contains: urea, creatinine (protein), uric acid, amino nitrogens, ammonia, sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride compounds, sulphate compounds (organic and inorganic), enzymes, hormones, trace elements

It contains various other constituents, the amount and concentration of which depends on diet and health. Most of these materials are essential substances for maintaining the body and can be recycled. This is one of the reasons why *amaroli* may give so many benefits. However, this is still subject to experimental verification and as yet no real scientific proof has been given to substantiate the claims of proponents of *amaroli*.

Overcoming fear

If you want to start to practise amaroli, the biggest obstacle is your own mind. It is difficult for most people to even touch urine, let alone take the first sip. This has to be overcome gradually.

The best method of overcoming your phobia is to first of all wash your hands in urine. Then the following day, or after a few days, start to wash different parts of your body. Eventually you should be able to wash your whole body in urine. Of course you should also wash afterwards with water.

Then, during washing with urine, tentatively put a drop on your tongue. You will find that it is not as bad as you think it is. In fact, you may even find it tasty. There is one man in the ashram who says that it reminds him of Jamaican beer (not rum).

Eventually you will find that you can take a sip of urine without the slightest hesitation. It is then a short step to actually consuming a glassful of urine. It is only cultural brain-washing that makes us nauseous at the thought of consuming urine.

PRACTICE

External therapy

Many people wash themselves thoroughly with urine every morning. After a minute or so this is all washed off with water. The effect is to remove inlaid dirt, grease and toxins from the skin. It has an osmotic and solvent action which draws out impurities. This is aided by the warmth of urine opening the pores of the skin; your body produces its own hot water, why not use it? At the same time, salts from the urine are taken in through the pores of the skin replacing lost salts.

Anyone who has cuts, grazes, sores or similar open wounds can use urine as a disinfectant. Not only does it keep the wound clean and free from infection, but it also seems to aid the speed of healing. If you suffer from boils, pimples or fungus infections such as athlete's foot, then you can use urine as a means of drawing out the underlying impurities. If you burn or scald yourself you can also use urine as a method of disinfecting and drying up the weeping sore. This also applies to blisters. It is said that a mixture of urine, ginger and salt rapidly removes ringworm and eczema. It is

also useful for alleviating mosquito and other similar insect bites. All these points make regular washing with urine a worthwhile habit. Don't waste your urine – use it.

People suffering from measles, chickenpox and other similar ailments can bathe in their own urine. Alternatively you can use urine packs. Urine packs can also be kept on wounds, boils, lumps and swollen areas of the body for prolonged periods of time. For small burns, ice or cold water is recommended, but for larger burns urine packs should be kept on for short durations. The pack should consist of a folded cloth, soaked in warm urine. These packs can also be used for certain internal diseases.

Urine can also be associated with massage. This applies to a full treatment of massage as well as massage during your daily bath. The massage should be directed towards the heart to stimulate the return flow (venous) of blood to the heart. This massage will stimulate the local blood circulation, remove toxins and squeeze impurities out of the skin.

Internal therapy

There are some people who praise and worship amaroli, claiming urine to be the divine nectar of life. Ardent supporters give a long list of diseases which can be treated with urine, including diabetes, kidney diseases, heart ailments, high blood pressure, oedema, malaria, general fevers, colds, asthma, menstrual disorders, piles, intestinal diseases, cancer and many more. If you suffer from any of these diseases then you have nothing to lose and everything to gain by trying amaroli. If possible, you should contact a doctor or nature healer who has empathy with amaroli, to obtain advice on the method to be employed for your circumstances. The therapy can be used for both chronic and acute diseases, but in the case of acute disease, such as gastroenteritis, it can be used as an adjunct to conventional therapies.

Those people who have read the topic on shankhaprakshalana¹ will appreciate the similarity between the salty water used in that practice and salty urine. The salt content of urine varies greatly. The first flow of urine in the morning is about two to four times more concentrated than urine passed in the daytime. This solution is hypertonic (that is, containing more salt than normal body fluid). Under these circumstances, the osmotic

pressure may draw water out of the body into the intestines. This flushes the system and has many beneficial repercussions. This directly helps to relieve constipation and indirectly other common ailments.

Depending on the diet, the amount of salt in the diet and the amount of water consumed, your urine during the day will tend to be hypotonic (that is, containing less salt than the body fluid) or isotonic (containing the same quantity of salt as the body fluid). The urine will be hypotonic if you consume sufficient water. This urine will be quickly absorbed into the blood to flush the kidneys, muscles, etc.

Amaroli and fasting

For removal of disease, amaroli is usually combined with fasting, either partial or total. The fasting in itself is a wonderful method of removing many types of diseases. All the energy of the body is directed to rectifying defects. Under normal circumstances it is largely preoccupied with processes of digestion. When you stop taking food then the energy is redirected to healing the body and purging waste material. However, we issue a warning: before undertaking a prolonged fast with amaroli you are strongly advised to seek expert guidance.

If you have no illness, then you can merely practise amaroli without fasting, or if you wish, you can fast for a regular short duration, perhaps one day a week. For example take your lunch, and then eat nothing until lunch on the following day. During fasting you can consume all your urine, taking care to discard the head of the first few flows. Even missing one meal can help to rest the digestive system, especially if you are a big eater.

Amaroli in combination with simple, balanced and vegetarian food is also recommended. The following are the basic rules and techniques of amaroli:

- If you intend to combine amaroli with fasting then you should reduce the intake of processed foods, meat, salt, spices, starches and heavy foods a few days before. Start to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- On arising in the early morning drink the intermediate portion of the urine. It is traditionally said that the urine should be consumed from an earthen or copper vessel.
- If you are ill you can take urine throughout the day. If you are healthy, three times daily – in the morning and then after meals is sufficient. It is approximately one hour after meals that there are said to be many valuable enzymes, and other chemicals present in urine.
- You can use urine for gargling, especially for a sore throat.
- Do *neti* with urine (*swamootra neti*). The method is the same as for *neti* with salt water² and can help to clear eye, ear, nose and sinus ailments, as well as headaches and so on.
- You must use your discretion when you practise. If you are unsure consult an expert.
- We suggest you combine amaroli with yoga practices to give a more integrated approach to health.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

² For details of *neti* with salt water refer to Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: Benefits

When describing the benefits of asanas there is always the tendency of oversimplification. The concrete benefits that we attribute to each asana in this book, though definitely valid, are only scratching the surface. We are actually underselling the vast benefits that can be obtained from them. We generally confine ourselves to listing the physical benefits and pointing out the parts of the body that are specifically influenced. These benefits are true enough, but asanas act in far greater depth. They don't actually affect specific parts of the body to the exclusion of all other parts. Every asana has positive and harmonious repercussions on the whole being of the practitioner. They act on the gross and easily perceivable physical body, but far more important in relation to maintaining or improving health and removing disease, they act on the psychic (pranic body) and personal mind. It is the influence on these far more subtle aspects of being that bring about the main benefits of asanas. But it is these more subtle planes that cannot be discussed in concrete terms. They have to be experienced. It is imbalance in the flow of prana and mental disharmony etc. that are the root causes of disease. Asanas help to harmonize both these spheres.

Asanas don't really act in a specific sense, but in a total sense. That is, they tend to harmonize the entire subtle instrumentation of the individual being. This in turn helps to rapidly bring about vibrant health, or at least improved health. Of course, we could say more about the effects on the mind and the pranic body, but the relationships and interactions are very subtle, and any attempt to be specific only leads to gross overgeneralization and eventually more confusion. It is for this reason that we stick to describing benefits that come from asanas through direct physical reasons, such as massage, stretching the nerves, etc. But the greatest and more profound benefits come through the influence of the asanas

on the pranic and mental bodies. It is these influences that can bring about remarkable improvements in one's overall health and attitude towards life.

Ideally, asanas should be done amidst conditions of peace and harmony. It is in this manner that they will most effectively purge the system of all types of abnormalities, whether physical, pranic or mental. This is one of the reasons why a sojourn in a quiet haven, combined with yogic practices such as asanas, is so therapeutic. Furthermore, asanas give greatest benefits if you simultaneously change food habits, sleep habits, etc. so that they are more conducive to wellbeing. The habits here are the ones that are obviously detrimental to good health. We won't discuss them here for you are more than likely fully aware of them. Even if you don't change inharmonious habits, asanas will still help to bring about good health, but they work less successfully and efficiently. In fact, without this effort to reorientate your way of life, they will probably only manage to maintain the status quo and prevent you going further down the road to ill health. We don't want you to become a faddist, or to suppress your natural inclinations. All we want you to do is to bear these factors in mind when you try to gain good health and when you use asanas as an aid.

Think of your body as an iceberg, the physical body being the part that lies above the waves of the sea. The greatest bulk of the iceberg lies unseen, submerged in the depths of the sea. It is the same with your individuality; most of it lies unseen in the more subtle layers of the pranic and mental body. It is this hidden aspect, the majority in fact of the total, which has the greatest control and influence on your mode of life, health, etc. During the practice of asanas, it is only the physical manipulations that are seen. One also becomes aware of increased flexibility etc. Yet while doing asanas (and here we mean

correctly with awareness and relaxation), there are vast harmonizing processes occurring below the normal levels of perception in the mind and pranic body. These are the most important revitalizing influences of asanas, yet also the least obvious. It is only with increased awareness that one becomes more and more familiar with these processes. The pranic flows are harmonized. These are the intermediaries between the mind and the physical body and they have a controlling influence on the processes occurring within the physical body. They are very real . . . they only seem unreal because they cannot be perceived in normal states of awareness.

To do asanas correctly, there must be awareness. This leads to relaxation of the subconscious mind and the eventual purging of mental conflicts etc. The mind is also acted on through the physical body. The physical practice induces harmonious flows of nerve energy, breathing, heartbeat and so forth. These in turn help to harmonize the pranic flows within the pranic body, which in turn helps to calm the mind.

The physical, pranic and mental bodies are only arbitrary classifications. They don't really exist as watertight compartments. They are part of the same totality of individual existence. It is only through limited awareness that one sees oneself as mainly a physical body with an accumulation of a few thoughts. The being of an individual extends from the physical, through the pranic and into the mental. And even much deeper again beyond limitation and definition, but at this stage we don't want to go further than the personal mind. It is the same with the iceberg. We all accept, at least most of us, that there is far more than the part that protrudes above the water. The totality is both above and below the sea. The totality of the iceberg is both visible and not visible. It is the same with individual existence; the physical body is the only part that most people see. In states of higher awareness these other realms can be perceived.

Our main purpose in this topic is to point out and emphasize that asanas act on deeper spheres of our individual being. Though they are predominantly physical, they have positive, harmonious repercussions on the more subtle realms of our being. Of course, most of the control and influence on the physical body

comes from the more subtle layers, but there is also a feedback so that the physical aspect influences the more subtle spheres. Let us illustrate this with the analogy of the iceberg again. The greatest control, in a sense, comes from the ice that lies below the sea. That is, the top section floats according to the dictates of the submerged part. But conversely, the top also affects the lower portion. If you start changing the contour or nature of the ice above the sea there will be repercussions below the waves, because it is a whole unit. There are interactions. It is the same with the direct action of asanas on the physical body: there are repercussions in deeper realms, beyond normal perception. This is the important point to remember. Asanas affect your mind, psychic body and physical body. You may not be aware of the subtle influences, but they take place.

So when we list the benefits of asanas, remember that far more is implied. Every asana has an influence on one's whole individuality, whether small or large. This even applies to the simplest asana. It is unrealistic to define rigid boundaries where asanas work and don't work, give benefits and don't give benefits. They affect and help to harmonize your whole being. We give specific benefits only because they are obvious from the physical nature of the asanas, can be easily felt in oneself and can be easily described. But the deeper benefits take place way below the level of perception of most people. You must experience them for yourself. So when reading the benefits that we briefly describe remember that there is much, much more that we don't mention.

Asanas: Practice

Having already described *bhujangasana* and *shalabhasana*¹ we will now describe *dhanurasana* (bow pose), which combines the benefits and features of both these backward bending asanas and also has some specific physical benefits of its own. Ideally, all three asanas should be done together, one after the other. However, those people who are short of spare time can practise *dhanurasana* as an alternative for the other two.

DHANURASANA (BOW POSE)

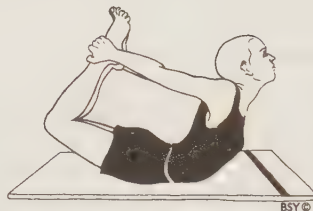
The Sanskrit word *dhanu* means 'a bow'. Therefore, this is called 'the bow pose', because in the final pose the body resembles a bow, the trunk and thighs representing the wooden part of the bow and the lower parts of the legs and the arms representing the bowstring. This is a perfect description of the asana.

Scriptural references

This is a well-known asana and mentioned in various yogic texts. To save unnecessary repetition we will merely quote a verse from the *Gheranda Samhita*: "While lying on the ground, stretch your legs as straight as sticks. Catch hold of your feet with your hands behind the back. Adjust your body so that it takes the shape of a bow. Rock to and fro. This is *dhanurasana* according to the yogis." (verse 1:19)

Basic technique

There are a number of variations of *dhanurasana*, all having their own good points. The method that we will describe as the basic technique is the one most widely practised and taught. Try this technique and also the alternative methods described later. Compare them and choose the variation that suits you. Lie flat on the floor, facing downwards. Bend the legs at the knees and bring the heels as close as possible to the back.



Reach back with your hands and grasp the ankles of each leg.

Hold the feet together so that the big toes are in contact.

Place your chin on the ground.

Relax your whole body, especially your back.

This is the starting position.

Breathe out deeply while on the ground.

Breathe in deeply.

Then tense your leg muscles and try to straighten your legs.

This is of course impossible because of the anchoring effect of the arms.

The result will be that you will arch your back and lift thighs, chest and head off the ground.

The only muscular contraction should be in the legs.

The back, the arms and the rest of the body should be relaxed as much as possible.

The arms should remain straight and passive; they take no part in the actual raising of the body but act as tie bars.

Hold the head back and raise the chin.

You should adjust your position so that the soft part of the abdomen (the belly) supports the weight of the entire body on the ground; this can be achieved by adjusting the height of the head or by slackening or tensing the legs. Hold your breath in the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for as long as it is comfortable.

Don't strain.

Then slowly relax the leg muscles and return to the starting position.

When you reach the ground, breathe out.

Relax the whole body for a short period of time until the respiration returns to normal. Then you can repeat the practice.

Breathing

First exhale and then inhale deeply in the starting position. Hold your breath as you raise the body, stay in the final pose and return to the ground. Exhale when you have returned to the starting position.

Mistakes to avoid

This is an asana that is often done incorrectly. Take care to avoid the following mistakes:

- Tensing the back in order to raise the body into the final pose. Only use the leg muscles and let the back be passively bent backwards. This is a little difficult for many people, but with practice it will become easier.
- Holding the feet instead of the ankles. Make sure that your hands wrap around the region of the ankles, not the feet.
- Separating the feet. Keep the feet together so that the big toes remain in contact throughout the entire practice. Beginners will find it easier to keep the knees apart. If you wish you can try to bring them closer together while in the final pose. This will intensify the effect of the asana.
- Resting the weight of the body on the ribs instead of the soft part of the abdomen in the final pose. Adjust the balance of your body so that the belly lies in contact with the floor. This is easily done by adjusting the height of the head, by either tensing or relaxing the leg muscles, accordingly.
- Bending the arms. Keep the arms straight throughout the entire practice.

Variation 1

This method is essentially the same as the basic technique already described, but with one notable difference: the breathing is deep and slow in the final pose.

The technique is as follows:

Do all the actions described for the basic technique as far as raising the body into the final position. Instead of holding the breath, breathe slowly and deeply. Try to accentuate the rhythmical expansion and contraction of the abdomen with the breathing.

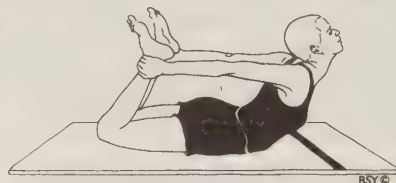
Stay in the final pose for as long as possible without strain.

Then return to the ground.

This method is a little more difficult, but it gives an accentuated massage to the abdominal organs.

Variation 2 – for beginners

The following is a simplified version of dhanurasana. It is called *saral dhanurasana* (easy bow pose). It gives basically the same benefits as other forms but at a slightly reduced level. It is a good asana and is ideally suitable for beginners and for people who cannot do the other forms of dhanurasana.



The technique is as follows:

Take the starting position described for the basic technique.

Place both the knees and feet together.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe out deeply.

Breathe in deeply.

Tense the leg muscles and bend the feet backwards towards the head as far as possible. Keep the knees and the thighs on the ground throughout the entire practice; don't raise them.

Try to raise the head and chest as high as possible off the ground, using only the leverage of the legs.

Let the back muscles remain passive.

This is the final position.

In the final pose, the breath can either be held or can be deep and slow.

That is, the breathing can be as given for the basic technique or for variation 1. Choose that which you like best.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then slowly lower the head and the chest to the ground by relaxing the leg muscles.

Repeat the practice when the breathing has returned to normal.

Variation 3 – rocking

While in the final pose one can rock to and fro on the abdomen. This increases the massage

of the inner organs. To initiate this rocking movement it will be necessary to both:

1. Alternately tense and relax the leg muscles slightly,
2. Breathe in and out.

Both of these actions change the position of the centre of gravity and induce a forward and backward movement. At first the movement will be slight, but it will increase as the body gains momentum. When in full motion, the chin will nearly touch the floor at one extreme and the thighs will touch the floor at the other extreme. Needless to say, the back must be tensed during this variation.

Do as many rocking movements as you can without excessive strain. Men should be careful not to injure themselves by compressing or squashing their testicles. Beginners will probably find it easier to separate the knees while rocking to and fro. This rocking motion cannot be done in variation 2 – saral dhanurasana.

Awareness and duration

Direct your awareness to the breathing and relaxation of the back. In variation 1, you can be aware of the alternate inflation and deflation of the abdomen in the final pose. In the rocking variation you should be aware of the coordination of breathing and the flexion of the legs to induce the rocking.

Remain in the final pose for as long as possible without strain. Do it as many times as you wish providing there is no excessive drain of energy. We recommend 3–5 rounds.

Limitations

People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, hernia, peptic or duodenal ulcers, appendicitis, colitis and other abdominal ailments, should not do this asana.

Precautions

Don't practise dhanurasana after meals; wait for at least three or four hours.

It is advisable not to do dhanurasana immediately before going to bed at night, as this asana stimulates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous centre in the navel. You may find this prevents the onset of sleep.

Sequence

In your asana program, dhanurasana is ideally practised after bhujangasana and shalab-

asana respectively¹. It should be followed by a forward bending asana as a counterpose.

Benefits

Dhanurasana roughly duplicates the benefits of bhujangasana and shalabhasana. However, there are notable differences. In shalabhasana, the back muscles are tensed, while in dhanurasana they are passive. In bhujangasana, the back muscles should also be relaxed, but the main influence is on the small of the back in the region of the sacrum. In dhanurasana, the main influence is the intense intra-abdominal pressure. Each of these asanas has its place in an asana program. They complement each other. It is for this reason that they should be done one after the other.

Dhanurasana is very useful for overcoming lethargy and sluggishness in mind and body. It has a direct effect on the solar plexus at the navel, which is a large sympathetic nervous centre so important for healthy functioning of the organs of the body.

These nerves are brought into maximum efficiency, which in turn leads to improved functioning of the whole body, especially the digestive, eliminative and reproductive organs.

It decongests the entire abdominal region and its organs. The liver, the multi-duty organ of digestion is massaged, which leads to an overall improved digestion. The pancreas is toned up so that it secretes the correct amount of glucagon and insulin at the right time. The entire alimentary canal is reconditioned, as well as accessory glands. Blood is encouraged to flush through the whole system and this acts as a cleaning process. The kidneys are rendered more efficient, which leads to better fluid balance within the body. It helps to alleviate constipation, dyspepsia, sluggishness of the liver, diabetes and excess fat.

The spinal column is realigned and rejuvenated. The ligaments, muscles and nerves are given a good stretch, especially on the front (anterior) surface. This relieves stiffness and the spine is made more supple and healthy. The deep muscles of the back are exercised which recirculates stagnant blood.

Dhanurasana massages the heart. This is done via the diaphragm, which is pushed towards the heart by the extra pressure in the abdomen. It is also useful for alleviating various chest ailments. For example, it is

suitable for removing the hunching tendency of asthmatics, which aggravates ill health. Dhanurasana realigns the back and thereby improves the breathing processes. This in turn leads to free flow of air through the nasal passages.

Various endocrinal glands are massaged and toned, notably the thyroid and the adrenals. The secretions of the adrenals are regularized. Blood is flushed through the glands. It is this effect that quickly removes tiredness, for cortisone is secreted to give you the required lift; or if you are overactive, the secretion of cortisone is reduced so that the body attains balance. This also helps to alleviate various types of rheumatism.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2 and Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 3

Pranayama: Practice

One of the main aims of pranayama is to induce a deep state of mental and physical tranquillity. The slower the breathing rate the better. The sound should be imperceptible, or nearly imperceptible. But the breathing must not be forced. If you find difficulty in breathing slowly, then you should reduce your duration of retention.

There is also another factor to remember if you are practising reasonably long breath retentions and prolonged inhalations and exhalations. You will find it difficult if you are eating large meals. You should reduce your intake of food if you find that pranayama is uncomfortable. This will not only enhance the benefits of pranayama but also make it far easier to do. If you feel any negative effects from the practice then you should stop for some time. If necessary contact a qualified yoga teacher for further guidance. It is better to be safe than sorry.

Integration of jalandhara bandha and nadi shodhana stage 4 (continued)

In the previous lesson we combined nadi shodhana with the practice of jalandhara bandha. The internal retention (antar kumbhaka) was done while locking the chin in jalandhara bandha. The previous ratio was 1:8:6:2. This is quite an advanced ratio especially when combined with jalandhara bandha¹. Therefore, for this lesson you should continue the same practice. Remember that the ratio for inner retention is 8. It is during this period that you should practise jalandhara bandha. At this stage don't attempt to do jalandhara bandha with outer retention of breath. This will come later.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 4

Meditation: Japa (Part 2)

As the subconscious mind is progressively cleaned out and one makes headway in meditation practices, one is confronted by the enormity of the psyche and overwhelmed by incredible visions, premonitions of the future and many other things. Though one should watch these infinite numbers of psychic manifestations, it is so essential not to become too enraptured, enthralled and enslaved by them. Watch them by all means, but don't be distracted from going deeper into the more subtle realms. And it is possible to go deeper, much deeper than even the imagination dares penetrate.

Don't become attached to the psychic world. Watch, experience, but always try to remain a witness. Be detached . . . be aware. This is the means of not becoming ensnared and distracted from going deeper into one's being. Of course, at this stage you may not be exploring the psyche, but you will in time, if you persevere. We give this warning so that you bear it in mind when you start to delve into the incredible realms of the psyche below the subconscious (or, perhaps beyond the subconscious is a better term). Don't be waylaid too long by the pleasant scenery, and it is really so beautiful, on your way back to the source. Always remember that the aim is to reach and experience the essence of your being. Don't get lost. In the previous lesson we gave an introduction to japa, together with a few practices¹. In this topic we want to give a few more techniques.

JAPA – PART 2

Reflection

The practice of japa can bring wonderful benefits if you reflect on the meaning of the mantra. This can be done during the actual practice or throughout the day. This need to know must come from the very depths of your heart. It will not bring results if you do it half-

heartedly. Each mantra has vast power which you have to unfold. You have to merge yourself with the mantra and experience everything that the mantra evokes. Each mantra represents something that cannot be spoken about. It has to be experienced. This is why we are not very interested in explaining the meaning of mantras. This is bound to be superficial. You must find out the meaning of a mantra for yourself. No person can ever explain the real meaning of a mantra to another person. Communication cannot bridge the chasm between verbal meaning and direct experience.

This process of reflection on the meaning of a mantra intensifies the whole process of japa sadhana. However it is really for people who have penetrating powers of enquiry and who have a one-pointed calm mind. You are not obliged to reflect on the meaning of a mantra during japa. Japa will give wonderful results without this reflection, but it can lead to the highest fruit of japa sadhana.

Devotion

Devotion is another powerful method of intensifying the practice of japa. It is to be practised by those people who are naturally inclined towards worship. It is for those people who are notably emotional in character.

Each mantra is shakti, each mantra is a direct link to the divine. Therefore, when you chant your mantra, try to feel that you are communing with the divine essence. Feel love in your heart. Be aware of all the associations of the mantra. Let this welling-up of feeling (bhava) fill your whole being. Eventually the heart will recite the mantra spontaneously. This will intensify the whole process of japa.

Japa sahita dhyana

The Sanskrit word *sahita* means 'together with', or 'combined with'. The word *dhyana* means 'meditation'. This practice is a combination of

japa and awareness of an inner symbol (antar trataka)².

If you chant the mantra Aum then you can use the corresponding symbol as a focus of attention. If you have a personal mantra and you know its symbol then you should use this, otherwise you can choose any other symbol in association with your mantra. If you have an ishta devata, then you can use this for trataka. If you are not too sure on this point contact a qualified teacher.

Incidentally, each mantra is inseparably associated with a definite symbol or form. Therefore, if your mind attains a deep state of relaxation and one-pointedness and receptivity, and if the whole mind is filled with the sound of the mantra, then the specific psychic symbol will spontaneously arise to conscious perception. In this way, you will find out the exact form or symbol of your mantra.

The method is basically the same as we have already described in the previous lesson¹, but you must visualize your chosen symbol in front of your closed eyes. If so inclined, you can feel devotion or reflect on the meaning of the symbol and mantra.

If your mind is not one-pointed it is quite difficult to visualize a clear picture. Therefore, we recommend that you first of all calm down your mind and remove distracting thoughts by practising methods 1 and 2 described in the previous lesson¹. When the mind becomes concentrated, then you can start to practise japa sahita dhyana. This is a more difficult practice, but it is also more powerful. Your awareness must flow towards the mantra, the symbol and the japa rotation. If you find it difficult to maintain a fixed inner image, practise the method previously explained¹.

Likhit japa

The word likhit means 'written'. Therefore, this practice is called 'written japa'. It involves writing the form of the mantra down in a notebook hundreds of times. For example, you can write the symbol of Aum as follows: ॐॐॐॐॐॐॐॐ. You can of course choose any symbol that you wish.

The letters should be as small and as neat as possible. This will increase the concentration. Write each symbol with the utmost care, proportion and sense of beauty. Let each symbol be a work of art, at least to you.

As you write each mantra, you should mentally chant the associated mantra. This may not seem to be a meditation practice, but it is nevertheless. If you write pages and pages of symbols and simultaneously chant the mantra, then you will induce one-pointedness and harmony of mind. If you associate this writing with devotion and/or reflection on the meaning, then this is even better. This is a well-known practice in India. During the month of Shravana, Hindus traditionally pick numerous leaves from the bilva tree. The mantra *Aum Namah Shivaya* is written on each leaf with red powder and offered to Lord Shiva. This practice continues for a month and generates great devotion.

This is a practice you may like to try on a quiet Sunday afternoon, instead of reading a newspaper or sleeping.

Sumirani japa

This form of japa is designed to be practised throughout the whole day. It is usually done with the aid of a mala with 27 beads. This is carried around by the individual on all occasions. Of course, this may not be very practicable for most people, but this is the traditional method. With people who undertake full time sadhana, this practice is often done continuously. That is, whatever the circumstances, the mala is rotated and the mantra mentally chanted. It is said that this should also be done during sleep. The aim is that eventually the mantra arises spontaneously from the very depths of your being. You don't need to chant the mantra – the mantra chants itself. Your whole being resonates with the mantra. The mala rotates itself. This makes the mind incredibly one-pointed and powerful, and helps in gaining success in other spiritual practices and can induce meditation in itself. It is very powerful, but it is also very difficult and impractical for the average person. It is a little difficult to continuously rotate your mala while talking to your boss, while driving the car, while attending a meeting or whatever, but it is at least a practice you can try when you have a holiday, when you are walking or when you have some spare time. If you chant your mantra regularly during all spare time, then eventually the mantra will manifest itself automatically at any time when you are free of tasks or commitments. It will repeat itself in

the background of all your actions. This is very powerful and will quickly lead you to higher experiences.

Ajapa japa

This is spontaneous japa which arises in harmony with the natural rhythms of the mind-body complex. We will introduce this subject later in the book³.

General note

Japa only becomes overwhelmingly powerful when it is done regularly without fail.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

We have introduced you to two subjects that are regarded by many people as suspect: bhakti yoga and amaroli. All we want you to do is keep an open mind to both these topics. If you are uncertain, then don't commit yourself, but at least be open to the possibility of their validity. Many people have used them and praised them, not because they were deluded but because they obtained benefits. If you feel any disinclination to practise amaroli, then don't. We have introduced this subject more to open your eyes than for a specific practical application. We have the highest regard for

bhakti yoga. It is the high octane fuel rocket to expanded awareness, if and only if, you are inclined towards bhakti. If you don't feel that bhakti yoga is your path, then follow other paths, but at least keep an open mind.

In Lesson 14 we introduced the meditative technique of japa. Continue to practise it and also continue with pranayama in the way described in the text.

Little needs to be said about the other practices that we have introduced, namely dhanurasana, only that it should be practised.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	20
Aum chanting	—	10
Japa	—	30
Chidakasha Dharana	—	15
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Aum chanting	—	4
Japa	—	25
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		90

Program 3: 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Yoga Mudrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
Japa	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Dhanurasana	3 rounds	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
		30

Try to find more time so that you can practise the very important meditation techniques.

Lesson 16

That which can be told is not the Truth.
That which can be named is not the Name.

—Lao Tse – *Tao Teh Ching*

Bhakti Yoga (Part 2)

You should remember when reading this topic that it is only words. Words, no matter how cleverly woven and constructed can never convey the meaning of bhakti. Bhakti is an experience that you must know for yourself. If you try to understand bhakti through words and concepts then you will miss its essence and merely become lost in a whirlpool of verbal ideas. You will delude yourself. This discussion can only indicate the direction of the path . . . you must walk along the path and discover the destination for yourself. Bhakti comes from the heart, not the mouth or the head.

Bhakti does not only depend on the outer expression. It depends on the inner feeling. A person who quietly does his daily work can just as easily be a bhakta as a person who sings devotional songs throughout the night and day. Only the bhakta can know that he is a bhakta.

In this second discussion¹ we want to delve into the more fundamental aspects of bhakti yoga, especially the pitfalls.

Hypocrisy and self-deception

Don't become lost in false feelings or superficial showy expressions of bhakti. Don't try to impress other people with false displays of devotion. Only express and follow that which comes directly from your heart. Be true to your personality. If you feel no bhakti at the present time, don't worry, it is something that will arise spontaneously if you sincerely practise other forms of yoga.

As Shakespeare so wisely said: "To thine own self be true." This is important. Why express devotion to anything unless it springs directly from the depths of your being? If you express devotion without the corresponding inner feeling, then this is hypocrisy and self-deception, which are two of the greatest obstacles on the path of bhakti yoga. They are major blocks on the path to expanded awareness. Many people worship a deity, a sage

or their guru without the slightest feeling of bhakti. It is only habit, an automated action. Be careful not to fall into this rut and if you are already in it, then quickly get out of it.

Incidentally, faith (*shraddha*) is often confused with self-deception. They are totally different. Faith means belief in something which is yet to be experienced or known personally. This is not self-deception. It is merely accepting that there is a purpose to yoga practices. Faith implies believing that the sages, yogis, saints, etc. were not misguided and that they experienced something that is at present beyond one's normal experiences. So faith and self-deception have totally different meanings. Self-deception implies that one deceives oneself and in this way blocks out receptivity to new experience. Faith, on the other hand, implies, or at least it should, openness to new experience in the future. Those who have faith should take great care not to become caught in the web of self-deception. They must merely believe that there is something beyond current experience and that they are not chasing castles in the sky or empty myths. This is one form of faith. It is completely different from hypocrisy and self-deception.

There are many parables and stories that illustrate this point. The following are two examples: A wealthy landowner was performing ritual worship on the banks of the Dwarka River. The saint Vamakshepa happened to be bathing in the river at the same time. He watched the landowner and after a few minutes began to splash water on him. The landowner tolerated this treatment for a few minutes, but then became annoyed and shouted at Vamakshepa: "Are you blind? Can't you see that I'm doing worship? Why are you disturbing me?" The saint laughed aloud and asked him: "Are you saying prayers or buying a pair of shoes from Moor & Co. of Calcutta?" The saint then continued to splash water over him with

even greater force. The landowner was dumb-founded and humbled by this rude exposure of his inner mind, for indeed the saint was perfectly correct. He had been practising outward worship, but inwardly he was mentally walking the streets of Calcutta intent on buying a new pair of shoes. He bowed before the saint and asked his blessings so that he could be more sincere in his worship.

Guru Nanak once accepted an invitation from a Muslim ruler and his minister to attend a service at a local mosque. It was a large congregation and when the prayers were offered everyone knelt. Only Nanak remained standing and took no part in the service. When it was over, the ruler and his minister turned to Nanak and said angrily: "You are an imposter! You said that you would offer prayers along with us." "Yes, that is true" said Nanak, "I did promise to pray with you, but since you were not praying, how could I?" "Such blasphemy, explain yourself!" they cried. "Does praying merely consist of kneeling and bowing?" asked the guru. "No, of course not" replied the minister, "that is only the outer expression. It is the inner worship that is important." "That is exactly what I meant," said Nanak. "While the service was going on you were thinking of your mare and the birth of its foal. You were thinking that the foal might fall into the well." The minister bowed his head in shame. It was true. "And what about me?" asked the nawab. "Oh you were busy with the horse which your agents are purchasing in Kabul." The nawab confessed that this was perfectly true and the whole congregation was struck dumb with amazement.

It is so easy to fall into this trap. And the trap is not that you think about other things. No, there is nothing wrong with these everyday affairs. The trap lies in the fact that one can so easily fool oneself into believing that this is worship, or that this is bhakti yoga, or that one is an ardent bhakta. This is the trap of self-deception. It is far better to think of all these things while simultaneously knowing that the worship is not really an expression of bhakti. This is honesty and is far preferable to self-deception. In fact, a person who is honest with himself and his motives and who practises no yoga or follows no religion is more likely to expand his awareness than a person who deceives himself while praying or performing

rituals for twenty-four hours a day. It is the sincerity that is important.

Another trap is to attach great importance to empty clichés and generalities. It is easy to speak of God this, Bhagavan that, Hari Ram this and Christ that, and to seriously think that there is meaning in the words. Most words in this context are empty, yet many people think that their words have great significance. It is easy to consider oneself a great sage by merely learning the contents of various scriptures.

A good example immediately springs to mind, told by a visitor to the ashram regarding his guru in the Himalayas. One day, his guru was visited by a very learned pandit who had studied many of the Indian scriptures. They talked about many things, but the visitor was more intent on displaying his knowledge than seriously discussing anything. After some time they started talking about the *Bhagavad Gita*. The scholar immediately made it clear that all the verses and knowledge were on the tip of his tongue. With perfect spontaneity the guru said: "Be careful not to choke on it." In fact, this sharp statement almost made him choke, for his ego was very much deflated.

This story clearly illustrates how easy it is to fool oneself into thinking that one knows all that needs to be known, and this is an obstacle on the path of bhakti. It is important not to be intoxicated by book learning or empty, meaningless statements. Words only have meaning if they are backed up by personal experience.

Before one starts polishing the floors of a house it is first of all necessary to sweep out all the accumulated dust and rubbish. It is the same with the path of bhakti: first of all one must clean out all the dross. When this is done, then one becomes a suitable vehicle for the expression of bhakti.

Faith and bhakti

Faith and bhakti are different. Faith implies that one believes that there is some good purpose for doing something. That is, though there may be lack of personal experience, one has sufficient faith to accept that the experience does exist. Without faith we would be nothing in life. Without faith we would not practise asanas, pranayama, meditative techniques or any other yogic practices. If we did not have faith that there is a good

reason behind them, then we would never practise them. When practice is translated into experience, then faith drops away. It becomes superfluous. Faith is associated with the instructions of the guru. Without faith one would not follow his instructions. Without faith a guru-disciple relationship cannot exist.

Faith leads to the experience of bhakti. This is not blind faith, but acceptance that certain actions and efforts need to be done in order to tread the path to expanded awareness, to that which is presently beyond comprehension.

Faith implies that your practices of bhakti yoga and other forms of yoga will lead you somewhere, that they will not lead you into the depths of ignorance. There has to be faith that the path of bhakti yoga does lead to higher awareness and bliss. You have to have faith in the efficiency of the sadhana. Without this faith you would never do anything. The *darshan* (meeting) with a great sage or your guru will intensify faith, for you will see a living example of a person who has travelled the path that you are presently travelling. This is a great source, inspiration and intensifier of faith.

Dogma, fanaticism and indoctrination

The problem with bhakti yoga is that it can easily lead to blind dogmatism combined with fanatical enforcement of one's beliefs on others. This is not bhakti. Throughout history bhakti has been totally misunderstood and misapplied. Bhakti is the path of love and devotion, yet it has often tended to develop along the path of dogmatism and fanaticism. This is exactly the opposite of bhakti. On the path of bhakti yoga one can devote oneself to a specific form of divinity, any form of one's choice. It does not matter, but at the same time, one has to be tolerant of any other form of divinity worshipped by other people. Tolerance lies at the very core of bhakti yoga.

At first bhakti yoga involves focussing one's whole attention on the object of worship or love. This is the stage where bhakti can easily become intolerant and corrupted. This narrow-mindedness automatically disappears when one's devotion leads to expanded awareness and spontaneous bhakti arises from the very depths of the heart. One realizes an underlying essence behind all individual deities and comes to a point of understanding where one accepts all these forms as divinity.

This is the paradox that you must understand for yourself.

It is only in the early stages that bhakti can seem to be a form of indoctrination. But this is not the purpose of bhakti yoga. The aim is to reach states beyond indoctrination. The aim of bhakti yoga is to lead to something that removes present indoctrination and concepts and leads to perfect freedom of being. So let us not repeat the errors of history and corrupt bhakti yoga by making it sectarian and narrow. The aim is much higher than dogmatism, fanaticism and indoctrination. The aim is knowledge and bliss. Bhakti yoga is the means and bhakti is the experience.

The importance of no expectation

Don't expect anything from your practice of bhakti yoga. This also applies to any other form of yoga. If you practise asanas, pranayama, meditation practices and so forth, try not to expect anything. It is a strange thing that the more one expects, the less one will receive. This is because expectation implies ego and the greater the ego, the less one will make progress in yoga. This is very important. So in bhakti, don't expect anything in return for your feeling of bhakti. Merely project your devotion without expectation. This is not easy, but try. This point is clearly explained in many scriptures. The following are a few examples: "My devotee desires nothing, not even transcendence if offered to him by Me, for desirelessness is the most direct route to liberation." These are the words of Krishna in the *Uddhava Gita* of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*.

In the same text, it is also said: "I am ever present with him who is devoid of all expectation, who is given to contemplation on Me, who is serene, free from hatred and sees Me everywhere." In the *Uddhava Gita*, expectation is also related to the three basic modes of nature: sattwa, rajas and tamas. It says: "Worship of Me without expectation of reward is sattwic (purified aspect of nature); that done with expectation is rajasic (active and passionate aspect of nature); whereas that done with the intention of harming others is tamasic (inert or dark aspect of nature)." Lack of expectation is important, but it is not easy. If you have expectations, don't worry. These will automatically disappear as you progress along the path of bhakti yoga.

This non-expectation also applies in everyday life. If you help someone, don't expect thanks. You don't deserve it. You should actually thank them, for they have given you an opportunity to help them. They have given you a chance to serve them, so thank them and don't expect praise.

This world is a playground, a school where you can learn about yourself, where you can recognize and eradicate your imperfections and problems. Every person and everything is your teacher. Without interactions with other people and situations you would never be able to know your own hang-ups and limitations. Every second of the day you are understanding more about yourself. Sometimes this is obvious, usually it is less obvious and operating more subconsciously than consciously, so actually you should thank every person you meet for teaching you something. You should view every situation as a lesson. Though you may be helping another person physically, they are also helping you to understand yourself. If you help a person in distress, they are giving to you as well as you giving to them.

Non-expectation is a fundamental aspect of bhakti yoga. This was tersely stated by Chaitanya, the great Bengali bhakta. He said:

*I pray not for wealth; I pray not for honours;
I pray not for pleasure, or even the joys of poetry.
I only pray that during my whole life
I may have love and devotion . . .
That I may have pure love to love Thee."*

This is bhakti without expectation. This is the epitome of bhakti. We do not expect you to live up to this elevated level of non-expectation, no ego bhakti, but bear it in mind as the aim. Let your aspiration be directed towards this perfect selflessness.

Shattering the ego

Bhakti implies that you feel devotion. From this comes effacement of ego and from this comes expanded awareness. Usually love and devotion are associated with and dependent on reciprocation; one loves and expects love in return. This is ego-centred love, not bhakti. Bhakti is love that expects no return. Bhakti means not taking, but giving.

As one treads the path of bhakti yoga, self-interest automatically starts to fade. There

is a transformation into giving and more giving. Devotion increases as the awareness of the bhakta increases, as he recognizes and progressively removes his limitations and imperfections. The feeling of bhakti is intensified. The level of awareness is correspondingly intensified. The greater the level of bhakti, the less the ego. The aim is to reach a point where there is total identification with the object of worship. It is at this point that one can say the same thing that Hanuman (the monkey deity and the epitome of a bhakta) said to Rama: "O Rama, when I identify with my body I am your servant. When I identify myself with the individual jiva (soul) then I am part of you. But when I lose all these identifications, I realize that I am you." *Valmiki Ramayana*

Once bhakti starts to affect the heart, every experience becomes a lesson, a means to reduce pride and power of the ego. It is easy to attain some kind of success in something, work, study or whatever and think: "What a clever person I am." The ego is so easily inflated, but it is a strange thing that when one feels egotistical, there quickly occurs something which deflates the ego. That is, while one is wallowing in a feeling of ego pride, something generally happens to highlight this false sense of pride so that one realizes how the ego was playing games and how it overpowered one's being. On the path of bhakti yoga something always seems to occur to prevent this ego complacency. This is the grace of being a bhakta, even if only slightly. This is the way events seem to flow, continually knocking the bottom out of egotistical mental status.

Pride must be one of the greatest obstacles on the path to expanded awareness. There is a wonderful and very practical book called *The Dark Night of the Soul*, which deals with this subject in great detail. It was written by the Christian mystic, St. John of the Cross. He says that aspirants have to pass through the so-called dark night of the soul. As they gain some experience they become greedy for more. They become egotistical or think themselves more advanced spiritually than other people. They become caught in many ego traps. These are blocks to expanded awareness, and they occur in this so-called 'dark night of the soul', where one's imperfections are purged.

This false pride, although an obstacle, is actually an important part of spiritual life.

These obstacles are a form of grace for without knowing and facing these ego distractions we would never know their existence and so would never remove them. There would be no progress along the path to expanded awareness. It is during this dark night of the soul that one comes to terms with one's faults, recognizes them and takes steps to eliminate them. So these egotistical states are both obstacles and a necessary part of spiritual life. It depends on the point of view. In fact, St. John of the Cross says: "Aspirants are led into the dark night of the soul to be purified of imperfections. It is in this manner that they can progress further onwards." So in a sense, these feelings of pride, achievement, status, etc. are necessary on the spiritual path. It is during this dark night of the soul that one's imperfections are realized. This leads to more humility, which in turn leads to greater bhakti and communion.

Strangely enough, it is often during spells of this dark night, or during periods of spiritual regression or backsliding that one's bhakti can be intensified. One is confronted clearly with a block or a misconception or a strong sense of ego, which was not obvious before. One realizes that one has come face to face with a further imperfection that can be purged. One realizes how important it is to experience these strong ego feelings. One's darkness leads to more bhakti. This dark night of the soul eventually leads to more light. The ego is humbled so that one can know more bliss and harmony.

Summary

In this topic we have been concerned with some of the pitfalls of bhakti yoga. The aim has been to point out the more obvious and common misconceptions and traps. For this reason, this is probably the most important of this series of discussions on bhakti yoga², for without recognizing these blocks it is very easy to lose one's way on the path. Once one loses the way, especially with the more gross pitfalls such as hypocrisy and self-deception, it is very difficult to find the right direction again and to make progress.

Notes

¹ Bhakti Yoga: Part 1; Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1

² Bhakti Yoga: Part 3 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1;
Part 4 – Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1

Asanas: Sarvangasana

So far in this course, we have described various types of asanas: those that twist the spine and those that bend the spine backwards and forwards, as well as standing asanas and meditation asanas, but as yet we have not discussed any asana which inverts the body. In this topic we intend to rectify this situation by describing *sarvangasana* (shoulder stand pose).

Sarvangasana has beneficial effects on the entire body. It drains stagnant blood from the legs and abdominal organs, thereby increasing the general health of these areas. It tones up the thyroid gland, which again has positive repercussions on the whole body. It improves respiration and massages the organs concerned with digestion, elimination and reproduction and gives many more benefits, which will be discussed subsequently. This asana should be an integral part of every asana program.

Many people who start basic yoga practices are instantly attracted to sirshasana (the headstand pose). They hear that it gives many benefits and therefore immediately feel obliged to practise it. Often they practise sirshasana for too long and their body is insufficiently prepared and full of toxins. Under these circumstances, sirshasana can do more harm than good. It is for this reason that we advise people to practise sarvangasana as a substitute for sirshasana. It gives essentially the same benefits and is far easier to perform. Furthermore, incorrect practice of sarvangasana is less likely to cause harm than incorrect practice of sirshasana. It is a good idea to include at least one inverted asana in your daily practice program, but let it be sarvangasana instead of sirshasana. This applies mainly to beginners. You can start to practise sirshasana when you have purified your body and developed more control of your body and sense of balance¹.

Definition

The Sanskrit word sarvangasana is made up of three separate words: sarva, anga and asana.

The word *sarva* means 'whole', 'all' or 'entire', the word *anga* means 'limbs', 'parts', 'organs' or 'members'. Sarvangasana is so called because it is an asana which influences the whole body and its functions. The Sanskrit name is perfect, as it exactly describes the fact that the asana affects the entire human organism. This total effect is achieved mainly by harmonizing the endocrinal system, especially the thyroid gland. This subject will be described shortly.

The most common English name of the asana is 'shoulder stand pose'. It has various other names, including *salamba sarvangasana* (supported shoulder stand pose) and the pan-physical pose.

The thyroid

Sarvangasana has a profound and characteristic influence on the thyroid gland. Because of the importance of this small gland, it is worthwhile giving a brief description of its anatomy, functions and relationship with various types of disease.

The thyroid gland is an important part of the endocrinal system. It is a small butterfly-shaped organ located just below the voice-box (larynx) in the front part of the neck. It has two lobes, each of which is about 4 cms long and weighing 10 grams. These lie on either side of the windpipe and are joined by a narrow band or bridge of tissue which crosses in front of the windpipe.

The thyroid gland produces thyroxin (as well as tri-iodothyronin), a powerful hormone that affects practically every cell in the body. Its main function is to regulate the rate at which food and oxygen are used by the various cells of the body. This is known as metabolism.

This gland has a profound influence on physical, emotional and mental development. In a healthy person, the correct amount of thyroxin hormone is produced and secreted to meet his or her particular needs. This is clearly

shown by abundant energy and the ability to work and play without undue fatigue.

If the thyroid is out of balance then it can secrete too little thyroxin hormone. This condition is known as hypothyroidism. It tends to make the individual sluggish and sleepy. All the bodily functions slowdown. The intellectual faculties are dulled. The individual tends to become fat, constipated, apathetic, and indolent. If this malfunction occurs in children, it can lead to dwarfism, deformity and a generally retarded mental development.

On the other hand, a malfunctioning thyroid can also produce too much thyroxin. This is called hyperthyroidism. This leads to a speeding up of all the bodily functions. A person with this ailment tends to be continually overactive, both physically and mentally, and is unable to relax. There is a general loss of weight, diarrhoea, increased blood circulation and respiration, extreme nervousness and excitability and often psychotic symptoms. If this malfunction occurs in children, then it can lead to excessive physical growth, so that the child becomes abnormally large. This has led to persons growing to heights of two and a half metres.

We have indicated only the basic symptoms of a faulty thyroid gland. There are a multitude of specific diseases that can occur, too numerous to mention in this brief summary. The important thing that we have tried to indicate is that disease can result if the thyroid produces either too much or too little thyroxin. For perfect health there has to be perfect balance.

Why does the thyroid cease to function correctly? There are various reasons. Some people say that lack of iodine in one's diet can lead to enlargement and faulty operation of the thyroid. An essential constituent of thyroxin is iodine. If this is not sufficiently abundant in the food that one eats, then the thyroid is unable to manufacture suitable amounts of thyroxin to meet the needs of the body. There seems to be a lot of truth in this idea, for in areas of the world where the iodine content of the soil is low, there are higher incidences of thyroid problems. There are various iodine tablet supplements on the market which overcome this problem.

Another cause of malfunctioning of the thyroid is bad or sluggish blood circulation. This can be caused by a sedentary life and

general lack of exercise. If the blood in the thyroid gland (as well as any other part of the body) is devitalized or insufficient, then it cannot receive proper nourishment and it cannot flush out impurities. It becomes ineffective and consequently the health of the body suffers. It is here that sarvangasana contributes directly to improve the efficiency of the thyroid and in turn the entire body. The inverted position of the body directs a good blood flow to the thyroid gland under the action of gravity. Furthermore, the curvature of the neck in the final pose tends to restrict the normal flow of blood to the brain through the external carotid arteries. This flow is redirected into the thyroid gland. Thus for the duration of the asana, the thyroid is flushed and nourished with an extra supply of blood, which helps to improve its functioning.

A third important factor in faulty functioning of the thyroid is emotional stress. Many people start to develop thyroid problems after they have suffered emotional shock or when their stress level in life becomes too great. The social pressures of exams, business, worrying about what the neighbours think and so many other factors of modern life tend to upset the balance of the body. The thyroid is directly controlled by the pituitary gland, the master controller of the endocrinal system. The pituitary gland, in turn, is controlled by the brain and the mind. Thus mental stress and dissatisfaction lead to imbalance of the pituitary gland, which leads to general disruption of the entire hormonal system, including the thyroid gland. It is here that yoga can again help to normalize the system and bring the thyroid into balance. Through all yoga practices one can attain deeper states of relaxation, whether temporarily or permanently, which helps to harmonize the hormonal system, including the thyroid gland. The body has an innate tendency to repair itself and establish equilibrium if, and only if, it is given a chance. It receives this chance during periods of yoga practices. It is also worth pointing out that sarvangasana is a simple and yet effective asana for inducing quick relaxation. It is for this reason that sarvangasana helps to integrate and normalize the operation of the thyroid gland.

Thus we can summarize by saying that the thyroid is a vital organ of the body. If it starts

to function incorrectly, then the whole body will also suffer. Sarvangasana brings about health of the thyroid in two ways: firstly, it directly improves the physical condition and functioning, and secondly, it helps to reduce excessive emotional and mental stress, which tend to interfere with its operation. It is not without reason that sarvangasana is regarded as one of the best of the yoga asanas, for its benefits are many.

The parathyroid glands

These four small glands are not so well known as the thyroid gland, yet they are also vital for perfect health of the body. They are oval-shaped masses of cells, each weighing about thirty milligrams. They are located outside the thyroid gland and have an independent blood supply. They secrete a hormone called parathyroxin (also called parathormone) which controls the calcium level in the blood. In this manner these tiny glands influence the growth and regeneration of the bones in the body. If they function incorrectly, then the bones can either become too soft or too brittle, either of which can have disastrous effects. Sarvangasana improves the efficiency and health of these glands in the same way as was explained for the thyroid gland.

The mechanics of inverted asanas

All inverted asanas have a characteristic influence on the functioning of the body. In order to appreciate the benefits obtainable from sarvangasana and all inverted asanas, it is worthwhile explaining the basic manner in which they affect the body. The following explanation is not intended to be comprehensive, for it only describes the gross effects. Sarvangasana and all inverted asanas have more profound and subtle influences on the human organism which have to be experienced to be understood.

Inverted asanas improve the blood circulation to the brain. This is a subject that will be discussed more fully when we describe sirshasana later on¹. Without a proper nourishing blood supply the brain cannot function effectively. If the blood supply is stopped for even a short period, then the brain quickly undergoes irreparable damage. The efficiency of the brain depends upon an adequate supply of blood. Normally, the blood reaching the

brain has to rise from the level of the heart against the pull of gravity. The heart is usually able to meet the blood demands of the brain even against this adverse condition. However, a short practice of any inverted asana injects the brain with an abundant supply of blood, and is assisted (instead of opposed) by the pull of gravity. This helps to flush out impurities and irrigate the brain cells, improving both general health and the coordination between the brain centres and the different parts of the body.

The master controller of the endocrinal system, the pituitary, lies in the brain and also receives an extra supply of blood during inverted asanas, helping to improve its efficiency and functioning. This, together with the improved operation of the brain in general, leads to greater harmony and balance in the entire hormonal system. Many ailments are caused by disequilibrium in this highly sensitive system, and inverted asanas help to prevent the occurrence of these ailments or remove them. This is a subject that will also be more fully discussed with sirshasana later¹.

Inverted asanas help to remove deoxygenated blood, especially in the lower limbs. Supply of blood to the lower limbs of the body is of course assisted by gravity. However, on the return journey to the heart the force of gravity tends to impede the blood flow, which can cause stagnation of blood in the lower regions of the body, resulting in (or at least aggravating) such ailments as varicose veins. Physically active people generally suffer less from stagnation of blood because extensive muscular contraction during exercise tends to encourage the blood to move upwards in the blood vessels. It is a type of milking action that slowly causes the blood to move upwards against the force of gravity. Stagnation of blood is predominantly a problem with sedentary people who do little exercise. The lower organs don't receive adequate nourishment; they tend to become clogged with devitalized blood and waste products; the legs become easily and quickly fatigued; the digestive organs lose their efficiency and so forth.

Regular practice of at least one inverted asana helps to alleviate this problem. The inversion of the body allows the blood in the legs, abdomen, etc. to drain freely to the heart for purification and eventual recirculation.

This means that the entire circulatory system operates more effectively. Blood that was previously inoperative in the lower limbs is able to supply nourishment to the different regions of the body. Furthermore, on terminating the inverted asana, revitalized blood returns to the legs and supplies nourishment that may have been previously lacking.

As we have already mentioned, the digestive system is greatly improved through the practice of inverted asanas. The main organs of digestion, such as the liver, pancreas, intestines, etc. are easily prone to blood congestion, which reduces their efficiency and ability to digest food. Inverted asanas help to drain this accumulation of blood, so that it can be replaced by a fresh supply of blood. Food is digested into the body by means of the bloodstream. Furthermore, nutrition is distributed to all parts of the body by means of the blood circulation. This is the body's transportation system. Without a good blood circulation, the body can neither adequately absorb nor distribute the food. All the digestive blood flow must pass through the liver via the portal vein. This organ is easily susceptible to congestion, which impedes efficient assimilation of food. Inverted asanas in general improve digestion by allowing blood to drain from this organ. This removes congestion and in turn encourages new oxygenated blood to flow to these vital organs, helping greatly to improve general body health.

What we have already said also applies to the excretory and reproductive systems. The organs of these systems are also liable to become congested with devitalized blood. Inverted asanas help to recirculate this blood, preventing and alleviating various types of associated diseases, especially functional ailments.

The respiratory and digestive systems are intimately related in many ways. Furthermore, it is the up and down movement of the diaphragm with inhalation and exhalation that ensures the abdominal organs maintain optimum health. This continual motion of the diaphragm (the flat muscle separating the lungs from the abdominal organs) applies a gentle massage to the liver, pancreas and other digestive organs, keeping them in good condition. This is one reason why abdominal breathing is so important².

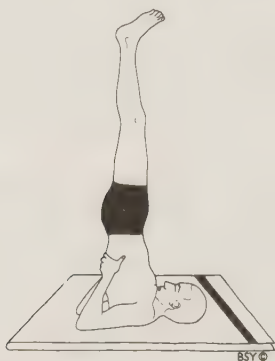
Normally the abdominal organs are below the diaphragm. During inverted asanas they are located above the diaphragm. That is, the weight of the abdominal organs resists the movement of the diaphragm during inhalation and assists during the period of exhalation. This tends to slightly increase the air pressure within the lungs during both exhalation and inhalation, helping to expand the tiny alveoli (air cells) in the lungs where the interchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide takes place. This improves the general health of the body for the interchange is rendered more efficient. The abdominal organs also benefit directly from this increased resistance during inhalation. The liver in particular is sandwiched between the diaphragm and the other abdominal organs. Therefore, the movement of the diaphragm moving upwards against the weight of the other digestive organs gives the liver a powerful massage, greater than it normally receives.

Many people suffer from displacement of the abdominal organs. A common complaint is visceroptosis, in which the abdominal organs are displaced downwards from their normal location. Regular practice of inverted asanas for a reasonable duration can be a great help in rectifying this type of ailment.

Inverted asanas have many other less obvious effects. They can improve the functioning of the eyes and ears under certain circumstances, especially where the blood circulation is insufficient. They can help to prevent falling hair and improve the skin complexion of the face by improvement of the blood supply. There are many other positive effects of inverted asanas, but we will not discuss them here. If you want more information you must contact an experienced person or find out for yourself. As we indicated in the beginning, inverted asanas have many subtle influences which cannot be easily discussed for they are more general. In particular, inverted asanas help to harmonize the bioplasmic or pranic flow of energy in the body, which has repercussions on one's entire health, for this is the sheath that controls the functioning of the physical body. If the pranic body is harmonized then the physical body will also be in a state of healthy equilibrium.

Furthermore, inverted asanas, if done correctly, with awareness, induce tranquillity

of the mind, which also helps to induce positive psychological and physiological changes within the human framework. This influence, together with the physical and pranic effect, makes inverted asanas very useful for maintaining general health, removing or alleviating various ailments and generally improving one's sensitivity for gaining the most from more advanced meditation techniques. So good in fact are some of the inverted asanas, that many people use them as meditative techniques in their own right. Of course, the same can be said of all asanas, but inverted asanas seem to have something extra.



SARVANGASANA
(SHOULDER STAND POSE)

Stage 1: raising the legs

Place a folded blanket on the ground.

Lie flat on your back with both legs straight and together.

Straighten your arms and place them beside the body, palms downwards.

For a few seconds completely relax the whole body.

During the next movement, raising the body, the breath can be retained inside or outside; that is, you can either breathe in deeply and raise the body or breathe out deeply.

It does not matter, but you should hold the breath.

Slowly raise your legs by contracting and using the abdominal muscles.

The movement should be gradual and with control; it should take at least 10 seconds for the legs to reach the vertical.

Keep the legs straight and together.

If possible try to raise the legs using only the abdominal muscles for this action will help to strengthen these muscles.

If this is impossible, however, you can help to raise your legs by pressing the arms against the ground.

At the end of the movement, the buttocks and back should be on the ground with the legs pointing directly upwards.

Remain in this position for a short time.

Stage 2: taking the final pose

In this stage the arms and hands should take an active part in assuming the final position.

Elevate the legs further off the ground by pressing the hands and arms against the ground and contracting the abdominal muscles.

Raise the buttocks and legs slowly; don't jerk or fling.

Keep your legs and feet together throughout the movement. Eventually your back should be almost vertical, with the body supported by the two arms and hands, the nape of the neck, back of the head and the shoulders.

Transfer the pressure of the arms to the elbows and upper arms.

Then fold the forearms upwards, placing the hands on the back and side of the chest.

Gently push the chest forwards so that it firmly presses against the chin.

Straighten your legs so that they are vertical. This is the final pose.

The body should be supported as much as possible by the shoulders, nape of the neck and back of the head.

The purpose of the arms is mainly to provide stability and to check the body if there is any tendency to overbalance.

Close the eyes.

Try to relax the whole body.

Breathe deeply and slowly.

Be aware of the breathing.

Stage 3: returning to the starting position

Stay in the final position for a comfortable length of time.

Then fold the straight legs over the head so that the feet are above and behind the back of the head.

Slowly release the position of the hands behind the chest and place the arms flat on the floor.

Slowly lower the buttocks to the floor.

Then gradually rotate the straight legs over the top of the head and lower them to the ground; again try not to use the assistance of the arms unless it is necessary. Completely relax the body when it is once again flat on the ground. Then practise the counterpose.

Mistakes to avoid

One should take care to avoid the following errors:

- Don't do the asana too quickly like a physical jerk. The movement of the body during raising and lowering should be slow, graceful, controlled and without sudden spasms. Many people forcefully propel themselves into the final position and nearly break their necks in the process. Slowly elevate the legs and raise the body, being aware of the operation of each relevant muscle and the progressive movement of the body. The same applies to the lowering of the body. The legs should touch the floor in the same way that a falling leaf would touch the ground.
- Don't raise the head off the floor throughout the entire practice.
- Don't tense the legs in the final pose; let them relax and don't point the feet. This is important, for tension of the legs implies contraction of muscles, which prevents free drainage of blood from the legs.
- Don't hold the legs perfectly vertical in the final pose if this requires muscular effort. Ideally the legs should be vertical but this does not suit the constitution of every person. If you find it easier to hold the pose comfortably by inclining the legs over the top of the head, then by all means do so. In fact, if you find that you can more easily press the chest against the chin by suspending the legs over the head, we recommend that you adopt this pose. However, there has to be a compromise; don't incline your legs too far over your head for you will be doing another asana and not sarvangasana. Your legs should be reasonably vertical, but so that you feel comfortable in the final pose.
- The chest (sternum or jugular notch) should be pressed against the chin, but without straining the neck. This is an important aspect of the asana. Without doing this, the asana loses many of its

benefits for the blood flow is not directed specifically towards the thyroid gland. However, if your neck is stiff, then you may find a little difficulty in doing this. Don't strain or force, but slowly loosen the neck joints and stretch the associated muscles over a period of weeks. Often, however, people are unable to press the chest against the chin because they don't raise the trunk as vertically as it should be. In this case, the arms should be used to further elevate the trunk, and the hands should be placed lower down at the back of the chest near the shoulders.

- The chin should not be pressed towards the chest. The chest should be pressed towards the chin. This is important.
- Keep the legs straight and together throughout the entire practice. There is no need to separate or bend them.

Alternative method for beginners

Some people may find difficulty raising their legs from the starting position while keeping them straight. Under these circumstances, there is absolutely no reason why you should not bend your legs in the starting position to make it easier to elevate them.

The method is as follows:

Lie flat on the ground facing upwards.

Bend your legs and place the soles of the feet flat on the ground with the knees pointing upwards.

Then raise your trunk to the vertical position by contracting the abdominal muscles and pushing the lower back with the hands and arms.

Keep the legs bent.

Adjust the position of the trunk so that the chest presses firmly against the chin.

Place the hands on the side and rear of the ribs with the elbows on the ground.

When you feel sufficient stability then slowly straighten the legs to attain the final pose.

Breathing

Retain the breath either inside or outside while raising and lowering the body. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

Awareness

Be aware of the smooth execution of the raising and lowering of the body while

adopting the final pose and then resuming the starting position.

In the final pose be aware of the slow and deep breathing. If you wish you can feel the breath moving in and out of the throat region and charging the thyroid with vitality.

Duration

There are conflicting opinions expressed regarding the most suitable duration of sarvangasana. But actually there should be no contradiction, for the duration depends on many factors. Beginners should practise sarvangasana for no more than a minute for at least two or three weeks of daily practice. Then this duration can be increased by thirty seconds every week. If you like you can increase by a few seconds every day – this is your choice.

For general health benefits, and for a person with reasonable purity of body, we recommend no more than three to five minutes in the final pose. If you want to increase the duration then we suggest you seek the guidance of a suitable yoga teacher who can assess your physical suitability. Often a person is recommended to practise prolonged periods of sarvangasana to remove specific illnesses. Under these circumstances, again you should seek expert guidance. If you practise sarvangasana for too long and your body is not prepared or is full of impurities, then the asana may cause harmful results. Sarvangasana and other inverted asanas can give wonderful benefits if, and only if, they are done correctly and for a suitable duration for the particular individual. It is when people practise them for excessive lengths of time that they cause themselves harm.

The best rule is to follow the dictates of your body. If you feel tired or any form of discomfort, then this is a sure indication that you have stayed in the final pose for too long. In this case immediately terminate the asana. But this is the upper limit; long before this point of tiredness you should have finished the asana.

You may wish to practise sarvangasana for a prolonged duration in order to increase brain power, or as a meditation technique, or as a preliminary to other meditation techniques. There is no harm in this" providing your body is healthy, the blood reasonably purified and providing you have been regularly practising other asanas for a year or so. There is no

reason why you should not practise for fifteen or thirty minutes. But again we advise you to seek expert guidance.

Counterpose

It is essential that you practise a counterpose after any inverted asana. In the case of sarvangasana, the counterpose can be any asana which bends the head backwards in the opposite manner to that which it takes during sarvangasana. The best asanas are bhujangasana³, ushtrasana⁴ as well as various other asanas such as chakrasana⁵, supta vajrasana and matsyasana⁶. These should be performed for at least a minute or so in order to remove the tension in the neck.

Sequence

Sarvangasana can be done either at the beginning of your asana program (after surya namaskara and shavasana) or at the end of the program. The choice depends on various factors.

If you practise only asanas, then it is best to practise sarvangasana in the beginning, for it is an excellent asana for intensifying the power of awareness and wakefulness throughout the ensuing asanas. This will allow you to gain the most out of the asana program. Many people practise asanas in an automatic, sleepy manner and due to this they fail to reap the full benefits.

If you practise pranayama and meditation techniques after your asana program, then you should do sarvangasana at the end. In this case, the other asanas slowly loosen up the body and relax the mind, while sarvangasana intensifies awareness and wakefulness for the following pranayama and meditation practices. This is most important, for without awareness, pranayama and meditation also fail to give their fullest benefits. If you have time, you can perform sarvangasana both before and after the asana program.

Many people do halasana⁷ (plough pose) immediately after sarvangasana. This is perfectly valid, for it is natural and easy to drop directly into the final pose of halasana from the final pose of sarvangasana. If you already know and practise halasana, we suggest you adopt the following sequence:

1. Sarvangasana starting position
2. Sarvangasana final pose

3. Halasana final pose
 4. Halasana variations (if you know them)
 5. Sarvangasana starting position
 6. Counterpose for sarvangasana
- This is an excellent combination.

People who should not practise sarvangasana

The following people should not perform sarvangasana without seeking expert medical guidance:

- Those who have weak hearts or excessively high blood pressure. Though after a short time the blood pressure is greatly reduced in sarvangasana, initially it is increased. It is the initial increase of pressure that can cause harm.
- People with an excessively enlarged thyroid. Though sarvangasana is a wonderful asana for alleviating and removing an enlarged thyroid, it can cause harmful effects if the thyroid is too swollen and if it is toxic. A person who has an excessively large thyroid should first practise other asanas and yoga techniques under guidance to reduce the swelling. When the thyroid has reduced in size, sarvangasana can be done with great benefit.
- People who have weak blood vessels in the eyes.
- Sufferers of arteriosclerosis.
- Sufferers of cerebral thrombosis.
- People with excessively impure blood. This is something that you must judge for yourself. If you are not sure then seek guidance. A person with experience will be able to tell immediately if your blood is pure or impure. If you are severely constipated or your skin is covered in boils, then this is an indication that your blood is excessively toxic.
- People with slipped discs. It is advisable not to practise sarvangasana if you have this ailment for you may aggravate the dislocation of the spine when raising and lowering the body to and from the final pose of sarvangasana.

General limitations

One should not practise sarvangasana under the following conditions:

- If you feel physically tired.
- During periods of illness and fever, such as during coughs and colds, influenza, etc.

- Until at least three hours have elapsed after food.
- During menstruation and advanced stages of pregnancy.

Sarvangasana should be immediately terminated if you experience the following:

- Excessive perspiration.
- Dizziness.
- Palpitations of the heart.
- General discomfort.

Sarvangasana can be done by people of all ages, young or old, male or female. Elderly people, however, should proceed carefully if they are learning the asana. Many people say that children should not practise sarvangasana for fear of upsetting their normal growth pattern determined by the thyroid. We don't agree with this belief, for sarvangasana does not alter the functions or duties normally carried out by the thyroid gland. The asana merely improves its operational efficiency so that it can carry out its functions more effectively and smoothly. The normal operation of the thyroid is in no way altered. You must also remember that children are continually twisting their bodies into strange positions and probably turn their body upside down a number of times daily. Thus most active children are unknowingly stimulating the blood flow to the thyroid in the course of their play while suffering no ill effects. It is understimulation and lack of exercise, especially in adults, that causes more harm. Moreover, if a child is sluggish and disinclined to play, we recommend that he or she practise sarvangasana to ensure that the thyroid functions correctly to give normal growth patterns.

Benefits

The benefits of sarvangasana are vast. The following is merely a brief resume.

The direct influence on the thyroid gland helps to remove many diseases and generally maintain good health of the entire body. The ageing process is very much associated with the endocrinal system. One can help to maintain youthfulness and rejuvenate an ageing body by regular practice of sarvangasana.

The thyroid gland controls the metabolism of the body. Therefore, by improving the efficiency of the thyroid gland through sarvangasana one can maintain the correct

body weight. Of course, this assumes that one does not consume excessive amounts of food. Many people are overweight because of hormonal imbalance, not specifically because of overeating. Sarvangasana helps to normalize the body weight by balancing the endocrinal system.

The endocrinal system is in a continual state of fluctuation because of adaptation to both the inner and outer environment. If the endocrinal system is malfunctioning, then the body is unable to adjust to these continual changes and illness can result. Sarvangasana acts on the thyroid gland, the pituitary and the brain. All these are mutually interdependent organs. By simultaneously balancing them Sarvangasana helps to balance the entire endocrinal system as well as all the systems that are dependent on the hormonal system, such as the circulatory, respiratory, digestive and reproductive systems. The body is a total unit and though it is composed of different systems, they are all mutually dependent on each other. They do not act separately. They are only discussed as distinct systems in books for easy understanding. If one system is out of balance then the other systems will also become unbalanced. Sarvangasana integrates all the body systems, improving health and removing disease.

Sarvangasana improves the blood supply to the brain. This is the master controller of the entire body – organs, muscles, nerves, etc. If the brain cells are not healthy, how can the rest of the body be healthy? A motor car, for example, cannot run without the engine. If the engine does not receive sufficient oil or petrol then its body, the car shell and moving parts cannot possibly work. It is the same with the human brain. If the brain is malfunctioning then the rest of the body must also function incorrectly. Sarvangasana helps to rectify this situation and in this way, many seemingly obscure ailments can be eliminated.

The influence of sarvangasana on the parathyroid glands helps to ensure normal bone growth and regeneration and can prevent premature ossification (hardening) of the bones.

Many asanas bend the spine forwards, but few of them specifically bend the cervical (neck) region of the spine in a forward direction. Sarvangasana does this very effectively and improves the flexibility of the vertebrae and

tone of the nerves that pass through the neck to and from the brain. Furthermore, the nerves in this region receive a fresh supply of oxygenated blood, which helps to keep them in good condition. These nerves penetrate the entire body and so their good health again leads to improved health of the whole body. The bending of the spine at the neck also helps to remove backache and headache.

The pressure of the chin against the chest in the final pose forces the practitioner to breathe abdominally. It is physically impossible to breathe from the chest in this position. Most people breathe very superficially and suffer bad health as a consequence. They don't breathe from the abdomen, and it is this type of breathing that is most important in the breathing process. This abdominal breathing during sarvangasana encourages the individual to breathe abdominally throughout the day. This is merely a matter of training, nothing more. But this simple training can radically improve health. Firstly, it improves the intake of air and secondly, it ensures that the abdominal organs are given the continual massage that they require. The improved respiration is of great help in treating bronchitis.

Sarvangasana is very useful for asthmatics. These people tend to breathe superficially by moving their shoulders and their chests – they tend to avoid abdominal breathing. Sarvangasana helps to rectify this situation and habit. Some asthmatics have also said that sarvangasana should be done immediately before an attack as a preventative measure.

Sarvangasana reduces blood pressure by acting on the carotid sinuses in the neck⁸. Therefore, sarvangasana is a useful practice for those people who have slightly high blood pressure. However, those people who have excessively high blood pressure should not do the asana for initially the blood pressure is increased.

Sarvangasana is very useful for treating piles (haemorrhoids) and varicose veins, for it helps to drain accumulated blood from these areas. People who suffer from these ailments should practise in the morning and evening for at least five minutes, more if possible. Those who have piles should rhythmically contract and relax their anal muscles, for this helps to remove the blood from the area⁹.

This asana is also very useful for toning the legs and removing fatigue.

Regular practice helps to remove various types of digestive ailments, especially where they are caused by blood congestion or general inefficiency of the organs. Diabetics are advised to practise sarvangasana for it not only influences the pancreas, but also the entire endocrinal system. If you suffer from visceroptosis (displacement of the abdominal organs) then you should practise sarvangasana to help rectify this situation.

Sarvangasana tones the reproductive organs and helps to prevent degeneration of the testes, gonads and ovaries as well as the other sexual organs, male and female. It has been found useful in helping to relieve menstrual, menopausal and other general sexual disorders. It helps to alleviate hydrocele, leucorrhea, spermatorrhea, etc.

During sarvangasana the whole region of the neck, throat and face is flooded with fresh oxygenated blood which helps to improve the nourishment of this entire area and the many organs in the vicinity. The tonsils (important lymph nodes for ensuring protection against infection), the ears, the eyes, the lungs, the thymus and so forth all benefit from the improved blood supply. The thymus is believed to play an important part in the normal growth of children. It also has an immunological role and so sarvangasana increases the resistance of the body to disease by influencing both the tonsils and the thymus. The salivary glands in the mouth also work more efficiently, which in turn aids digestion. Wrinkles and spots on the face are also reduced by the improved blood supply. Facial complexion is generally improved. In general, we can say that sarvangasana helps to eliminate and prevent various types of throat and nose ailments, including the common cold.

Finally sarvangasana is an excellent method of tranquillizing the mind and helps to bring harmony and peace into one's life. This is also useful for obtaining the most out of other yogic practices. If you perform sarvangasana before meditation techniques it will greatly help you to benefit fully from your practices.

Variations of sarvangasana

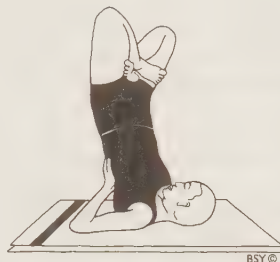
The following two asanas are well-known variations of the basic form of sarvangasana.

They should only be attempted after mastering sarvangasana.

PADMA SARVANGASANA (SHOULDER STAND LOTUS POSE)

In English this asana is known as the 'raised lotus shoulder stand pose'. It can be done in two ways as follows:

1. Perform sarvangasana. Then in the final pose fold the legs into padmasana.
2. Do padmasana. Then lean backwards and lie flat on your back. Elevate the legs to the vertical pose. In both methods the final pose is the same.



The benefits are the same as for sarvangasana, except that free drainage of blood from the legs is impeded. Therefore, people who want to treat piles or varicose veins should do the basic sarvangasana and not this variation. This asana gives an excellent stretch in the pelvic region and compresses the internal organs. It is useful for toning up the sexual organs, especially in women.

NIRALAMBA SARVANGASANA (UNSUPPORTED SHOULDER STAND POSE)

In English this asana is known as the 'unsupported shoulder stand pose'. It is similar to sarvangasana, and differs in only one way: the arms and hands are not held behind the back. The arms can be held in any one of the following positions:

1. Straight and vertical so that they lie in line with the raised legs and the trunk. In this variation there must be perfect balance of the entire body. If necessary you can practise near a wall to prevent falling and possible injury. The body is supported only on the shoulders, nape of the neck and back of the head. You should not try

this asana until you can do the basic form of sarvangasana without applying pressure from the elbows.

2. The arms are extended directly behind the head so that they are parallel to each other and flat on the floor.
3. The arms are placed flat on the floor, parallel with each other and pointed in the opposite direction to the head.

All these three forms of niralamba sarvangasana should be done slowly from the final pose of the basic form of sarvangasana.

Notes

¹ Sirshasana: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 4;

Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 3

² Breathing – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3

⁵ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

⁶ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

⁷ Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 3

⁸ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁹ Ashwini mudra – Topic 3 of this lesson

Mudras: Ashwini Mudra

An integral part of kriya yoga techniques is the practice of moola bandha¹. To do this bandha correctly one must have sensitivity in the region of the anus and the perineum (the area between the anus and the sexual organs). An excellent technique for developing this sensitivity is called ashwini mudra. Without mastering ashwini mudra it is very difficult for most people to practise moola bandha correctly. It is for this reason that we have introduced ashwini mudra at this stage.

Ashwini mudra also gives many benefits in its own right as we will shortly explain.

ASHWINI MUDRA (HORSE GESTURE)

The word *ashwini* means 'horse' and in this context the word *mudra* means 'attitude'. Therefore, this practice can be literally translated as 'the attitude of the horse'. It does not take much imagination to understand the reason for the name; if anyone has ever watched the anus of a horse, he will see that the horse very often does the yogic practice of ashwini mudra. That is, the horse rhythmically contracts and relaxes the anal muscles.

Posture

Ashwini mudra can be done in almost any asana, including any of the meditation asanas previously described². You can integrate it with any asana that you do in your asana program. However, since we have introduced sarvangasana³ in this lesson, we suggest that you definitely perform it in the final pose of sarvangasana. Not only does this mean that you can do two practices at the same time, but this combination happens to be very beneficial, as we will explain later.

Technique

There are two methods. For the sake of explanation we will assume that ashwini mudra is performed in a meditation asana.

Method 1: rapid contraction

Sit in a comfortable sitting pose.

Relax the whole body.

Close the eyes.

Breathe normally.

Rapidly contract and relax the anus.

Try to confine the contraction to the area of the anus though you will find that other pelvic muscles will come into action.

Let the muscular contraction and relaxation be rhythmical.

Don't strain.

Repeat the practice for as long as you have time available.

In this method there is no synchronization between breath and contraction.

Method 2: slow contraction and retention

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Contract the anus as you inhale.

At the end of inhalation hold the breath and also the contraction.

Let the contraction be as tight as possible but without strain.

Release the muscular contraction as you breathe out.

This is 1 round.

Repeat as many rounds as possible.

This method requires synchronization between the breath and the movement of the anus.

Note

It is impossible to confine the muscular contraction only to the small area of the anus. Other pelvic muscles and muscles associated with the sexual organs will also contract. But try as much as possible to concentrate on the contraction at the anus. At first this is difficult, but with practice it becomes easier and easier.

Awareness

In method 1 the awareness should be on the muscular contraction and relaxation at the anus.

In method 2 one should be aware of the coordination between the breathing and the muscular contraction and relaxation.

Duration

There is no limit on the duration of practice. It is only limited by the time that you have available. However, beginners should not overstrain their muscles. Increase the duration of the practice as the anal muscles become stronger and you gain more control over them.

Which method to practise?

You can practise whichever method you like best, or whichever is most appropriate for the pose in which you practise. However, method 1 is easier and therefore more suitable for beginners. If you find it reasonably easy to locate the area, you should start to practise method 2.

Benefits

Many people have weak anal muscles (sphincters). This is closely associated with such widespread ailments as constipation and piles (haemorrhoids). Ashwini mudra helps to stimulate intestinal peristalsis (the wavelike motion that propels the stool through the intestines to the anus for evacuation) and therefore is a great help in alleviating constipation and thus improving the general health and wellbeing of the practitioner.

Piles are characterized by an accumulation of blood in the region of the anus. The practice of ashwini mudra helps to squeeze this stagnant blood away from the anus. This process is intensified if the mudra is combined with sarvangasana³. Ashwini mudra physically draws the blood away from the anus and sarvangasana allows the blood to drain downwards back to the heart. Every sufferer of piles should definitely practise this combination daily.

Those people who suffer from prolapse of the anus or rectum should also do ashwini mudra. By strengthening the associated muscles, these ailments will slowly disappear.

As we have already pointed out, everyone who is seriously intending to practise kriya yoga in the future should definitely perform and master ashwini mudra. In this manner you will develop sensitivity in the anal area and be able to isolate the muscles from other

muscular systems in the pelvic region. This is important for eventual mastery of moola bandha.

Combinations with other practices

As we have already recommended, ashwini mudra can and should be integrated with sarvangasana. Either method 1 or 2 can be used.

Ashwini mudra method 2 can also be integrated with nadi shodhana pranayama, so that you hold the anal contraction during retention of breath⁴. The reader can adopt any other combination that his imagination will permit.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Topic 2 of this lesson

⁴ Topic 4 of this lesson

Pranayama: Practice

Pranayama is an essential part of kriya yoga. That is, to do many of the practices of kriya yoga it is necessary to exhale and inhale with control and to retain the breath for prolonged periods of time. It is for this reason that we are spending so much time developing the practice of nadi shodhana pranayama.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 4 WITH JALANDHARA BANDHA

Current practice

In the previous two lessons we suggested that you practise a ratio of 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation and outer retention respectively¹. We also suggested that you perform Jalandhara bandha with each inner retention. If you have mastered this practice then you should proceed to the next practice.

New practice

Retain the same ratio but now try to perform jalandhara bandha with both outer and inner retention. This is not an easy practice and we emphasize that you should not strain. In fact we prefer that you reduce the ratio rather than hold your breath beyond its capacity.

Combination with ashwini mudra

This is an extra practice that you can combine with nadi shodhana pranayama. It is not essential. If you want to integrate the practice, we suggest you do so in the following manner:

1. Until you develop control over the muscles of the anus, practise stage 1 of ashwini mudra². This should be practised during the periods of jalandhara bandha in conjunction with breath retention. During the breath retention you have to mentally count the duration so that you can maintain the fixed ratio. We suggest that you synchronize the mental counting with the

rhythmical contraction and relaxation of the anus. This will improve the intensity of your awareness and greatly improve the pranayama practice.

2. When you have developed sufficient control over the anal muscles then you can retain the muscular action for the entire duration of each breath retention. If you wish you can integrate your mental counting with the blood pulse that you will detect at the region of the contracted anus.

This is a very useful combination of practices, but please don't strain.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 4; Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 5

² Topic 3 of this lesson

Shivalingam

The shivalingam can be used as an object of concentration. It can be used as a focus of your awareness, to draw you into the deeper realms of your being. It can be used as a vehicle to higher experience.

The shivalingam is a widely venerated symbol in India. It is a tantric symbol, as well as being an integral part of Hinduism. But the veneration of the lingam is not confined to India. It has been revered throughout every part of the world, especially in bygone ages. It is a symbol which is buried in the deeper layers of your psyche. Even though you may not know this, it is nevertheless there, waiting to rise to the surface, to conscious perception, together with all the knowledge that surrounds it. If you bring the symbol up from the depths, then you will simultaneously realize the incredible reality that it represents.

If you have time, concentrate on the lingam, reflect on its meaning. And if your concentration and reflection is sufficiently intense and one-pointed, then you will bring a veritable jewel of knowledge to your awareness, a prize to the surface of the mind. Or we can put it another way: if you submerge yourself into the mind by intense concentration on the lingam, then you will start to plummet, to explore the depths of the mind. Whichever way you look at the process, the result is the same.

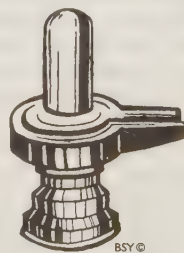
The word lingam means 'symbol' or 'sign'. In the tantric sect of shaivism (followers of Shiva) the lingam is the most important symbol. It represents consciousness or Shiva. There is a beautiful song about the shivalingam in India, called 'Lingasthakam'.

Concentration on the lingam

The picture that we have included can be used as an object of concentration, using the meditative practice of *trataka*¹. If you can visualize the lingam in front of your closed eyes (in the *chidakasha*) then this is an even better practice.

There is an excellent practice in shaivism which uses a small, well-polished lingam and a candle. The candle is placed behind and above your left shoulder so that it shines on the shivalingam held in front of the face. This produces a tiny dot of light on the surface of the lingam, which can then be used as a fixed point of concentration. This is a method of *trataka*, but it is more refined for it is combined with ritual worship, and mantras and other refinements that heighten the effectiveness of the practice. We have not given full details, for a specially made lingam is necessary, and they are not readily available. We have only mentioned the practice from the point of view of interest. It is an excellent technique that is practised among the shaivites (tantrics) of India.

The lingam implies much more than seems obvious and far more than can be conveyed by words. It was realized by sages in deep states of meditation. You can use it as a method for reaching the same state and experience.



Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

Meditation: Practices for Visualization

Everyone has the ability to mentally create and visualize any chosen object. However, most people lose this ability through lack of practice and a tendency to overload the mind with verbal concepts. The capacity to visualize internally remains, but it is dormant. It is only the artist or so-called primitive people who retain this ability to think in terms of pictures as opposed to words. Many anthropologists who have studied aboriginal and seemingly uncivilized people in different parts of the world, have noticed a fundamental difference in the way they relate to their surroundings and to life in general. They have noticed that these people tend to think or conceptualize in terms of mental pictures. They have much less tendency to think in terms of words, ideas and theories than does modern, scientific man. The whole mental process of perception appears to be different. But actually the only difference is that these primitive people function and perceive from a more fundamental level of the mind. That is, whereas modern man functions and lives on the surface of the mind, these other people function from deeper layers. They are more in contact with their own psychic levels.

There is nothing wrong with thinking and working in terms of ideas and concepts. This is an integral part of modern day life. Without this, science and the modern world could never have evolved and you would be unable to read these words. But at the same time, continuous functioning at this level tends to limit the awakening of the powers of the mind. The deeper levels of the mind do not function in terms of words. They function in terms of psychic pictures. Therefore, to expand one's awareness of the inner workings of the mind, to explore the deeper realms, it is necessary to open up this ability to perceive mental impressions in terms of psychic visions. It is necessary to develop receptivity to pictorial mental impressions. One must remain open

to the possibility of inner mental experiences in terms of visions.

All yoga practices help to increase this receptivity to psychic manifestations of the mind. A particularly good method of unfolding this faculty is by consciously creating mental pictures. This is the purpose of the following practice – object visualization at will. It supplements a similar practice called recall by revisualization¹.

At first you may find this practice difficult. Please do not worry. Most people will have this problem, especially those who are intellectually inclined. You have been habituated to thinking only in terms of words, but with practice and time you will find this technique easier and easier to perform. Furthermore, as you relax more and harmonize your life through yoga practice, you will also find that the practice becomes progressively easier.

OBJECT VISUALIZATION AT WILL

Purpose

We have already briefly discussed the purpose of the technique. It is a method of developing the faculty of visualization as a method of opening up the realms of the mind which are currently inaccessible to your awareness. Also many meditation techniques, including kriya yoga, require visualization of an inner object. This acts as a focal point for awareness and confines one's awareness to a limited field, removing it from the tangle of outer and inner turmoil. This one-pointedness, even for a short time, results in many benefits. It brings relaxation and acts as a focal point for looking into the mind. It is the prelude to the experience of meditation.

Many people are told that they must be aware of only one object during certain meditative techniques such as *trataka*², but they do not know which object to choose. They change from one to another, but once you

find the object that is ideally suited to your temperament there will be no doubt. You will cease to even consider other objects, but first of all you must find your symbol. This takes time, practice and aspiration. Visualization practices, such as the one we will shortly describe, help you to find the most suitable symbol. This can happen in two ways:

1. Either during the willed visualization of various objects, one object will suddenly and almost inexplicably manifest deep meaning to you. It will stimulate feelings that you did not before appreciate. This could be the most suitable object for meditation purposes.

2. Or during the practice or any other practice, you will suddenly be confronted with a symbol. It will spring up from the depths of the mind to conscious perception. Your sensitivity to inner perception has allowed it to surface. This too can be the object of awareness during meditative practices. So this practice is very useful for increasing your receptivity and perception of inner psychic symbols.

This visualization also has a more basic purpose: it calms the mind. If you have been buffeted by the storms of life, what better way is there of relaxing the mind and finding a little peace, than by creating beautiful inner objects or scenes? If you see an inner picture of a white swan, or a peacock, it is very difficult for the mind to remain angry or worried. So if you feel tense or emotionally upset, we suggest you try this practice. No special preparations are necessary. You can practise in almost any place and at any time.

Where to visualize?

The best place is *chidakasha*. That is, the space that you see in front of your closed eyes³.

Some people say that you should visualize the objects in the *hridayakasha*, the space in the region of the heart. Others suggest that one should visualize in the *daharakasha*, the space in the region of the pelvis at the mooladhara chakra. These spaces can be used for this practice and any other meditation practice, but most people will find difficulty in perceiving these spaces. For this reason we recommend visualization in *chidakasha*.

Technique

The explanation of this technique is very simple, but the actual practice is a little more

difficult, especially for beginners. The technique is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes.

Look at the blank space that you see in front of your closed eyes.

Think of any object.

Try to visualize this object in *chidakasha*.

You may find this difficult; don't worry.

Watch the image for a short time, say up to 30 seconds.

The image can be stationary or moving.

Then wipe out the image and think of another object. Create a new image.

Continue in this manner for as long as you can spare time for the practice.

Choice of objects

There is no limit to the objects you can choose. The scope is inexhaustible. It is only limited by your imagination. To help you, we will give the following suggested list. They are only our suggestions and it is not necessary to restrict yourself to them. Create any objects that you wish from your own mind.

Living things: a swooping bird, a graceful cat, a thoughtful elephant, an alert deer, an agile monkey, a peaceful contented cow, a sly fox, a fluttering butterfly, a proud peacock, a gliding fish, a basking crocodile, a beautiful lotus, a blood red rose, a large yellow sunflower, a blade of grass swaying in the breeze, a shady oak tree, a leaf dampened with dew and many other objects.

Deities and famous people: your guru, any great saint, Christ, Buddha, Mohammed, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali, Ganesha, Shiva and other deities.

Objects of nature: the sun, the moon, any of the signs of the zodiac, any precious stone such as diamond, onyx, sapphire, topaz, ruby, cat's eye, pearl and so forth, a towering mountain, a floating cloud, an oasis, rolling hills, green valleys, a sandy beach, rugged cliffs, a quiet forest and so on.

Buildings: a temple, a church, a mosque, the pyramids of Egypt, an ashram or monastery, a pagoda in a beautiful sculptured garden, a stupa, old ruins, a shrine or any holy place, a hermitage in the forest, etc.

Traditional symbols: a yin yang sign, a cross, a shivalingam, shaligram, the eternal flame, menorah, the chalice, a prayer wheel, an Aum

symbol, a trident and any other symbol that you can think of.

Time of practice

You can practise object visualization at any time. If you feel tired, angry or tense during the day there is absolutely no reason why you should not practise this technique as a way of harmonizing the mind. Even five minutes will help to calm the mind.

The best time to practise in order to attain clear visualization is after pranayama. Pranayama heightens sensitivity and makes inner visualization much easier.

Once again we remind you that you may find this technique a little difficult at first. Don't become frustrated for this will only lead to mental tension. Merely persevere and the technique will become easier. But time and regular practice are necessary.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

³ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have discussed bhakti yoga, ashwini mudra, sarvangasana, object visualization at will and nadi shodhana pranayama combined with jalandhara bandha with both

inner and outer breath retention. We suggest that you integrate these practices into your yoga practice program in the following manner.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana with Ashwini Mudra	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	20
Aum chanting	—	10
Japa	—	30
Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization	—	15
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4

Sarvangasana with Ashwini Mudra	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	15
Aum chanting	—	4
Japa	—	25
Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization	—	5
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Yoga Mudrasana	—	3
Sarvangasana with Ashwini Mudra	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	10
Japa	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization	—	5
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	10
		30

Try to find more time in order to do the very important meditation techniques.

Lesson 17

There was once a famous sculptor. One day he was visited by some people who wanted to see his work. He took them to his studio and showed them a number of pieces of stone that had been partly chipped away. None of the stone blocks resembled anything tangible and were far from being beautiful. The visitors were a little disappointed, for they came expecting to see aesthetic pieces of sculpture. Then the sculptor said: "This is where I start work on my creations; now let us go to the next room." His visitors went to the next room and were confronted with objects that were beginning to look more shapely. They were more impressed. Then the sculptor led them to another room and he showed them exquisite works of art. The visitors were delighted and exclaimed that they had never seen such delicate pieces of sculpture. But the sculptor explained that he had not finished work on them; they had yet to be polished before they reached the stage of perfection.

The gradual transformation that the visitors saw in the sculptures is analogous to the transformation that takes place in an individual when he practises yoga. At first his character is gross and unrefined. Something is lacking. Then in time, his attitude towards life, himself and others changes. His sensitivity increases. He starts to radiate that which is already within him. Yoga unfolds the inner being of the individual, in the same way that the sculptor slowly exposes the shape of his works. The shape is already inherent within the stone – the sculptor only cuts away the extraneous material that hides it. In the same way, the inner potential of the individual always exists – yoga merely cuts away the dross to allow it to show itself.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Bhakti Yoga (Part 3)

The seed of bhakti lies in the heart of every person. It is something that is hidden away deep within each one of us. It has been planted in the fertile soil of individual being and waits to be germinated and to grow, but first it must be watered with aspiration. In time it will sprout and arise spontaneously. Nothing needs to be added. Everything is already inherent within the seed. It needs only the chance to grow.

Each person is potentially a bhakta. Generally, however, this bhakti is not able to blossom, for it is hidden and covered with mental misconceptions, problems, dogmas and unhappiness. Each person should be an ecstatic bhakta, because everyone has the potential to tune in with the inner world beyond the limitations of individuality. Each of us has an individual mind. This mind is the centre of consciousness. Most people always live on the periphery of consciousness, yet the possibility of functioning nearer the centre always exists. And when this potential exists then bhakti must also exist in potential form. The nearer one moves towards the centre, the greater will be the feeling of bhakti. So every person is really a bhakta, but this is not manifested or experienced because of lack of knowledge and a fog of misconceptions.

Bhakti does not need to be artificially created or cultivated; it already exists within each person in seed form. All you have to do is to let the seed grow into a beautiful flower. As Swami Sivananda said: "Love is the law of life. To love is to fulfil this law. And fulfilment of this law leads to eternal peace and everlasting happiness."

Egoless and ego-centred love

There are two distinct forms of love. Firstly, there is ego-centred love, in which one loves another person, deity, saint or whatever with the expectation of love in return. This is the most common form of love and is really a love of oneself, not of someone or something else.

Secondly, there is egoless love. This is love for the sake of love, without any expectation of love in return. This form of love is bhakti and is felt even when it is not returned. This type of love may exist for some inexplicable reason; or it may exist because of some natural resonance or compatibility; or perhaps the love exists because of the realization of the deeper nature of the other person, deity, etc. In a higher sense, there cannot be love for another person, for other people, for a deity and so forth because of the understanding that everyone and everything is really one's own self. Others do not exist. This is non-directional love; love that goes out and returns to the bhakta.

Ego-centred love will chain one to the finite, whereas bhakti, intense non-expectational love, leads to the infinite. One limits, whereas the other leads to the unlimited. Bhakti or egoless love does not depend on beauty, wealth or reciprocation of love. Bhakti should be felt even if one is rejected. This is a test of the sincerity of devotion. The great Indian bhakta Rasakhan (born a Muslim, but who worshipped Krishna) said: "Bhakti is the fountain of all sweetness. It is not dependent on youth, virtue, beauty or riches, nor is it tainted by self-interest or thoughts of personal gain."

Ego-centred love tends to quickly subside with time, whereas bhakti increases and grows with every passing minute.

One-pointed bhakti

What is the way to success in bhakti yoga? It is overwhelming devotion to your deity or guru. The greater the aspiration, the quicker you are likely to transcend and the quicker you are likely to come face to face with something beyond everyday experience. This is perfectly illustrated by the following well-known story by Ramakrishna. A disciple asked his teacher how he could see the supreme. The guru told him to follow him to the nearby lake. Beside

the lake the guru suddenly took hold of the disciple and pushed him under the water. He held the disciple under the water for several minutes, while the disciple put up a furious struggle. Then the disciple was released and he came spluttering to the surface. The guru asked: "How did you feel?" "I was panting, gasping for breath – I thought I was going to die. I was desperate!" was the reply. The guru then said: "When you have that same overpowering feeling for the supreme, then you will know that you are not far away from seeing his form (darshan)."

There must be an intense quest. There has to be aspiration. According to Swami Ramdas: "Unless you have a burning aspiration for the supreme, the mind cannot be fixed on him. Where your love is, there your mind also is. Just as the miser constantly thinks of money and money alone, so a bhakta has exclusive devotion to the supreme."

This is the way to expanded awareness. One must try to act, feel and think while being aware of divinity, the deity or the guru. Always know that it is divinity that makes you feel, do and think. You are not the doer. This recollection will reduce the hold and the power of the ego. This is called surrender, and it is the way to higher states of consciousness.

Strangely enough, it is anguish that can lead to intensification of bhakti. Distress and torment at being separated from divine communion can lead to an upsurge of bhakti and heightened awareness. But this anguish must come from the very depths of one's being. The dissatisfaction leads to this intensification. The bhakta accepts all that comes to him as a gift intended to lift him into the deeper realms of awareness. Whether it is anguish, joy or whatever, it is all intended to raise the level of awareness of the bhakta, to speed him along the path to higher knowledge. You too must feel the pain of separation and have the same intense longing for union that the gopis felt for Krishna. This is one-pointed bhakti.

Bhakti grows steadily and naturally as you become more and more aware. It becomes stronger as misconceptions progressively drop away. The greater the awareness, the greater the bhakti. One becomes enveloped in a continuous stream of bhakti. It flows unceasingly and spontaneously like the River Ganges in full flood. In the *Devi Bhagavata*

it says: "When you think of the supreme in the same way that oil is smoothly poured from one pot to another; when the thought is continuous, then there arises unspeakable love and bliss." This is intense bhakti. There are no thoughts of one's limited self, only thoughts of one's deity, one's guru, one's symbol or thoughts of one's unlimited nature.

When the aspiration and bhakti reach such an intensity, then you will automatically invoke the grace of illumination and bliss. After this point there will be a total transformation in one's whole being. This is the power of concentrated bhakti. This illumination will in turn increase bhakti and reduce the ego. The grace will repeat itself. The circular feedback will be repeated, but will include more and more. The power of the ego decreases while bhakti and understanding become greater and greater. When you have tasted the sweetness of divinity even once, you will never forget. You will become a slave, unable to do anything but remember.

Bhakti – the means to harmonize the mind

If you naturally feel some kind of bhakti, no matter how small, then you are well on the way to cleaning out the mind of conflicts and phobias etc. You should follow the path of bhakti, for this is the means to calm the fluctuating mind, remove mental problems and make it more one-pointed. You will transmute a cloudy, murky personality into one that is as clear and sparkling as a crystal.

Live and take whatever comes, whether good or bad, for actually there is really nothing that is either good or bad. These are merely relative concepts. Everything is. Do and accept. This leads to peace of mind. Many of the tantric deities are depicted performing *abhaya mudra*. This is a mudra that indicates that everything will be all right. Everything that you are thinking now is incorrect and in time all your misconceptions and fears will disappear. These deities are indicating a great truth but without words. They are speaking through this mudra. Listen to them. In time you will find that they are 'speaking' the truth.

Bhakti purifies the mind. There is a beautiful analogy given by St. John of the Cross in his book *Dark Night of the Soul*. He says: "... this purgative and loving knowledge acts upon the mind which it is purging and preparing

for perfect union in the same way that fire acts upon a log of wood in order to transform it into itself. Fire, acting on the wood, first of all begins to dry it by driving out the moisture and causing it to shed water. Then it begins to make it black, dark and unsightly, and even to give off a bad odour . . . and finally, the fire begins to kindle the wood and give it heat. At last, it transforms it into itself and makes it the same nature of the fire."

This is indeed the process that each bhakta and in fact any person on the spiritual path must go through. The whole body and mind must be transformed and purified. Bhakti yoga is a powerful method of reducing the ego. Most of this mental debris is usually unrecognized. It is only when one becomes more sensitive and aware that these mental aberrations and impurities are seen. At this point they can be slowly whittled away. Without removing the mental disturbances it is not possible to become consumed with expanded awareness, in the same way that the wood cannot be consumed by the fire until it has been purged of moisture. This is one meaning of the word purgatory in Christianity; it is the stage in spiritual life where the mind is purged of all dross.

This process of purging the mind is not constant, but rather it fluctuates. One experiences peak periods of awareness and of bhakti, after which one is again subjected to purging. St. John of the Cross says: ". . . the fire of love once more attacks that which has to be consumed (the mental dross) for more purification." This drop back into a state of anguish and mental disturbance is absolutely necessary, so that the aspirant can be further purified.

More and more mental dross of a subtle nature is purged in the course of time. One feels more and more bhakti. St. John of the Cross says: ". . . the soul does not attain a sublime sense of love until it has passed through many trials, tribulations and a great part of the purgation."

The aim of bhakti yoga is to channel all one's desires, ambitions, all one's emotional responses into the feeling of bhakti. This will eradicate the fluctuations of the mind and induce one-pointedness. This is clearly described in the *Uddhava Gita* when Krishna said: "Though attracted by objects of desire and though he has not yet gained control over

the mind, my devotee is not overpowered by them, being shielded by his strong devotion to me. Just as fire steadily grows from a small flame to a blazing fire and burns fuel to ashes, so does devotion to me, O Uddhava, blaze forth and consume all obstacles."

This makes the mind one-pointed and the fit receiver for the grace of illumination and bliss. But first of all the heart and the mind should flow in one direction. Bhakti transforms, transmutes one's individual being from the gross to the more refined. It changes *tamas* (inertia and ignorance) into *rajas* (intense activity). Then it changes this *rajas* into *sattwa*, the purified state of calmness and receptivity. One becomes progressively sensitive in perception and feelings. In fact the state of *sattwa* is closely associated with bhakti. Shankaracharya points out: "The characteristics of pure *sattwa* are cheerfulness, realization of one's self, peace, contentment, bliss and steady bhakti towards the *atman*, by which the aspirant enjoys eternal bliss." (*Vivekachudamani* v. 119)

So there is a direct relationship between the clarity of the mind and bhakti, and here we mean spontaneous bhakti, not artificial bhakti. The cleaner the mind the greater the flow of bhakti and the mind becomes intensely one-pointed. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* Krishna says: "The unceasing flow of the mind-stream towards me at the mere mention of my virtues, combined with motiveless love (*prem*) for me is the characteristic of the real bhakti yoga."

Of course this bhakti need not only be felt towards Krishna; it can be felt towards any deity, any saint or your guru. This powerful one-directional bhakti leads to wonderful things. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says: "I take great care of those devotees who always think of me." (9:22) And there it is . . . a promise. Such bhakti leads to mental harmony and more. The intense bhakta soars into the realms of higher awareness, bliss and knowledge.

Divine love allegorized

Many mystics have allegorized divine love or bhakti in terms of human love. They have done this so that people can gain some idea of the meaning of the word bhakti. Most people know about the love between a man and a woman. Therefore, it is easier to explain the path and

experience of bhakti in terms of male-female love, in terms that most people can relate to through personal experience. The problem is, however, that people forget that stories and poems in this form are allegories and they take them too literally. Many allegories of bhakti are totally misunderstood. A good example is the well-known poem *Rubaiyat* by the Persian poet Omar Khayam. Most translators of this masterpiece have interpreted it as a series of wine drinking, women frolicking escapades.

The introduction to this poem in a book in the ashram library says: "He was a poet of revolt, preaching the unbeliever's pessimism and the creed – let us eat and drink now for tomorrow we die." This misses the whole point. Omar Khayam was neither a believer nor a non-believer. He was a bhakta, tuned in with higher states of consciousness and knowledge. He was in communion. There is nothing wrong with eating and being merry; if you want to do this, then do it. But Omar Khayam is not suggesting this at all. He is depicting bhakti through divine experience. The story really depicts the life and love of a bhakta.

The poem talks much about drinking wine. But this is not the alcoholic wine. It is the divine nectar of bliss. This is the intoxicating experience of expanded awareness, known as *amrit* (nectar or immortality) in many Indian scriptures, as *soma* in the *Vedas*, and as wine in the tantric texts. In the poem the main preoccupation seems to be drinking wine, day in and day out. This does not mean that the hero of the poem is in a continual state of drunkenness or semi-consciousness through consuming too much alcohol. It means rather that the bhakta was always in a state of divine intoxication, of heightened awareness. He was in a continuous state of meditation through drinking the inner wine of bliss.

Let us illustrate what we have said with a few quotations from the poem:

*And if the wine you drink, the lips you press
End in what all begins and ends in – yes;
Think then that you are today,
What yesterday you also were –
Tomorrow you shall not be less.*

(v. 42)

The wine is the bliss of increased awareness and the poem points out that you are, always have

been, and will be exactly what you really are. This is realization of one's real inner nature.

*You know my friends, with what brave revelry
I made a second marriage in my house;
Divorced old barren reason from my bed,
And took the daughter of the vine for a spouse.*
(v. 55)

Here the narrow confines of the intellect are discarded and the aspirant becomes a bhakta, experiencing intoxicating joy (wine or the daughter of the vine).

*For 'is' and 'is not' though with rule and line
And 'up and down' by logic I define,
Of all that one should care to fathom, I
Was never deep in anything but . . . wine.*
(v. 56)

In this beautiful verse the bhakta points out that hidden in the fog of concepts and definitions is his real nature . . . wine or bliss.

*The grape that can with logic absolute
The two and seventy jarring sects confute;
The sovereign alchemist that in a trice
Life's leaden metal into gold transmute.*
(v. 59)

The conclusive certainty of one's own personal experience of transcendental awareness (the absolute logic of the grape) through devotion overcomes all contradictions and differences in life and in religious sects. Through the alchemy of bhakti, life is transmuted from a whirlpool of dissatisfaction into a magical blissful experience.

Surrender

Who wants fame? Who wants money? Who wants beauty? Who wants to be learned? Who wants any of these things when one surrenders to the divine? The only thing that is important is the surrender. Yet, and this is the strange thing, all these things come even if you don't want them.

The bhakta becomes the happiest of people. He becomes the real king of the world. Few wealthy people or kings have known real happiness, but the bhakta knows supreme happiness whenever he thinks of the nature of everything, when he thinks of his deity or his

guru. He needs nothing more. He has everything.

Who would liberation or perfect spiritual freedom? If one is liberated then to whom or what does one surrender? It is better to remain a bhakta, for one can know the bliss of surrender. What is the point of liberation if this is taken away? If the *jivanmukta* (liberated being) is perfectly united, then who is there to feel bhakti towards? For the bhakta each second is an adventure, each second of time is the eternal moment of the cosmic play – the *rasalila*. Each moment is lived and experienced with an intensity that makes the heart pound with excitement. If one is really no longer part of this play, this adventure, then where is all the fun? This is the way a bhakta should think.

People have a multitude of desires for different things, which can never be satisfied. Because of this one becomes frustrated. Bhakti brings about satisfaction of all desires. The unquenchable thirst of desires is completely satiated. As Christ said: “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (*John 4:14*)

In the state of *atma nivedanam* the individual, the bhakta surrenders to the divine will. Everything that happens, whether pleasure or pain, is seen as the divine law. The bhakta is a mere puppet. He owes his existence to the cosmic will. This is following the biblical dictate: “*Thy will be done.*”

All work, actions and experiences are regarded as tests and trials of the divine process, as a means to remove imperfections. At this point, the supreme can do nothing but help his bhaktas. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: “I am under complete control of my bhaktas. They have taken over my heart. How can I leave them when they have totally dedicated themselves to me?” Such is the power of total surrender. One becomes receptive to divine grace: the grace of knowledge and bliss. This arises automatically when there is surrender and effacement of ego.

But this surrender is not easy. How many people could say the following from the depths of their being?

*Father – I abandon myself into your hands.
Do with me what you will.*

Whatever you may do . . . I thank you.

I am ready for all. I accept all.

*Let only your will be done in me
And in all your creatures.*

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I entrust my being;

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,

For I love you, Lord, and so I need to give myself,

To surrender myself into your hands,

Without reserve and with boundless faith.

This was written by the Christian bhakta Frere Charles de Jesus. Very few people could honestly say these words with the corresponding intensity of feeling and understanding. First of all the momentum of egotistical tendencies must come to a halt. These tendencies have to be worked out in the course of time through practise of other types of yoga.

For the last word on the subject of surrender we refer to the classical raja yoga scripture called *Yoga Sutras* written by Rishi Patanjali. Without wasting words he says: “Surrender to the supreme (*ishwara pranidhana*) leads to samadhi.” (2:45)

Grace

Grace is a much misunderstood word. In Sanskrit it is translated as *anugraha*. Grace is something that is always existent, but most people never feel it because of insufficient receptivity. It is only when the mind is calm, one-pointed and receptive that this grace can arise, bringing with it transcendental knowledge.

Grace is also that which makes us recognize our faults, mental blocks and so forth. It is grace that leads to the meeting with the guru. It is grace that causes you to begin yoga. It is grace that initiates many other events in life that lead to expansion of awareness. It is also grace when the guru helps the disciple to overcome mental conditioning. Grace means many other things, but these tend to merge into the realms of the undefinable. The important thing to remember is this: grace is ever present, but most people are rarely aware of it or tuned into it. When a person becomes open to everything, then the grace automatically flows. This receptive state of mind cannot be created merely by thinking about it or willing it. You can be told a thousand times

about the necessity of mental receptivity but this will never bring about this state. It can only arise spontaneously through yoga practices, including bhakti yoga. These practices transform the mind by slowly eliminating all the mental dust and cobwebs. When the mind attains a certain degree of purity, then grace will flow spontaneously. The greater the awareness, the more one will know and recognize this grace. Everything becomes grace.

Bhakti – the means to heightened sensitivity

The emotions heighten all experience. They intensify power in thought and action. Everyone knows this from personal experience. Normally, however, the emotions are scattered in all directions. They rarely have force, except in cases of intense anger or intense fear. They are generally expended on many interests and sentiments. On the path of bhakti yoga the emotions are concentrated on one thing. Emotions are transmuted into devotion.

This concentrated emotion leads to heightened sensitivity. One's whole mind and body becomes highly tuned, like a radio antenna. This leads to heightened sensitivity to other people, their thoughts, feelings and so forth. It leads to sensitivity to the inner environment of the mind. It leads to peak experiences.

Even one peak experience is enough to transform one's whole attitude and understanding of life. It moves through an angle of one hundred and eighty degrees. One realizes that what seemed so obvious, true and acceptable before was totally wrong. One's relationship with life undergoes a total change. It is completely reoriented. These peak experiences are on the route to perfection. They are signposts on the path.

Expression of bhakti

What does a bhakta do? Many people think that bhakti has to be expressed by wild singing or emotional prayers or utterances. And indeed this can be the case; many great bhaktas have sung the most soulful songs and created the most beautiful poems in order to express their joy, devotion and realization. Others have been famous for their joyful dancing. The Sufi dervishes are good examples. Every movement, every action is an expression of bliss and devotion. But this is not necessarily so. Many great bhaktas were less dramatic.

They continued to live their lives in a state of calmness. Each action and each thought however is permeated with awareness of the divine. Every act becomes blissful. Every act is done as worship, without a sense of limited ego, but according to the dictates of the situation, with intuition. He looks into the mirror of the world and sees the image of himself. Actions become perfect.

Many people may not seem to be bhaktas for they don't sing devotional songs, but actually they could be bhaktas blissful with the love of the totality. Bhakti need not necessarily be associated with wild, abandoned singing. It can be felt in many people without obvious outward expression. It depends on the dharma or personality of the bhakta. Some bhaktas seem to mellow with time. They become less obviously expressive. It is like someone who takes his first bottle of wine (alcoholic wine, that is). The initial intoxication makes him do crazy things. He says crazy things and jumps around like a madman. This is the expression of new experience. The seasoned drinker, who has been drinking wine for many years, is unlikely to do such things. He is more likely to sit quietly and enjoy the wine and the effects of the intoxication. The intoxication is the same, but the expression is much less dramatic.

Actually, every saint, yogi, tantric or sage is a bhakta. This applies whether they appear to be karma yogis, jnana yogis, raja yogis or whatever. They must be bhaktas, for the knowledge, the realization that they have in higher states of awareness must automatically lead to bhakti.

A Christian gospel singer, a Hassidic Jew at the wailing wall in Jerusalem, a dancing Sufi, a Hindu chanting or singing bhajans, a Buddhist of the bhakti sect of the Fair Land School reciting 'namuamidabu', a Muslim facing Mecca and praying on his mat and so forth can all be expressing bhakti. It depends on the inner feeling and attitude (bhava). In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: "... the devotee loses all sense of etiquette. He moves around the world without attachment. He always chants the name and his heart melts through love. He is like someone possessed, sometimes laughing wildly, sometimes weeping; and then he sings aloud and dances ..." (2:2)

This description of the expressions and actions of a bhakta is as good as any. But a

bhakta need not conform to this pattern. He will express himself according to the dictates of his personality, dharma and the given situation.

The methods of unfolding bhakti

There are many methods which the aspirant will find out for himself through his own experiences. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* nine modes of unfolding bhakti are given as follows:

1. *Shravanam* (hearing stories about the divine incarnations such as Rama, Krishna, Christ, Buddha and so forth).

2. *Kirtanam* (chanting the names of divinity).

3. *Smaranam* (continual remembrance of divinity in any form),

These three modes of expression – *shravanam*, *kirtanam* and *smaranam* – tend to harmonize the mind and remove any mental blockages, helping the mind to become more sattwic. Tension, excessive egoism, etc. all tend to drop away and the aspirant becomes more and more one-pointed. The aspiration to develop divine qualities is unfolded. *Smaranam* is especially powerful and has been the main spiritual practice (*sadhana*) of many great bhaktas, such as Kabir. It is continuous *japa* and continual remembrance. It is the remembrance and feeling that is important. This intensifies awareness and induces one-pointedness of mind. This topic of remembrance will be discussed shortly.

4. *Padasevanam* (service of the guru or service done in the name of the divine). This involves serving one's guru or doing work in the name of the divine. It means doing karma yoga, working earnestly to the best of one's ability. This also reduces the power of the ego and makes the mind one-pointed.

5. *Archanam* (ritualistic worship and offerings). This mode of expressing bhakti generally follows prescribed rules and formulas. It is a method of unfolding inner potential. These ritualistic forms of worship can be powerful when done with awareness and feeling. This is an integral part of most religions including tantra.

6. *Vandanam* (mental worship of everyone and everything as being the form of divinity).

This is mental worship of everything. It involves mental prostrations to every being, everything which is really the finite form of the supreme. In the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says:

"The sky, the air, the fire, water, earth, stars, planets, all the directions of the compass, trees, rivers, the seas and all living things constitute the body of the supreme." Therefore, the bhakta should mentally bow down and worship everything, knowing that he is worshipping the forms of the supreme.

7. *Dasyam* (the feeling of being the servant of the divine). One tries to do only the will of the divine with the attitude of being the servant. This helps very much to reduce the stranglehold of egoism.

8. *Sakhyanam* (the attitude of friendship). At this stage the bhakta feels as though he is on personal and intimate terms with the supreme. He treats the supreme as a close friend who is always in his company.

9. *Atma nivedanam* (total surrender). We have already discussed this under another heading. This leads to perfect union where the lover, loving and the loved become one.

This is a very comprehensive list and includes almost all methods of awakening bhakti. All other forms of yoga also unfold bhakti but these don't seem to be included. Actually they are included but in less obvious ways. Raja yoga and hatha yoga can be grouped with *archanam*, if you stretch your imagination and accept these forms of yoga as really forms of worship. This applies whether you are a theist or an atheist, for in both cases you are refining your body so that it becomes a perfect instrument. You may be doing hatha yoga (including asanas and pranayama) and raja yoga (including all meditation practices) for reasons of physical and mental health, but you are still worshipping. You are harmonizing your body so that it becomes a perfect part of the whole. Karma yoga is included in the mode of *padasevanam*, where you serve the guru, etc. It is only *jnana yoga* that does not easily fit in with any of the groups, yet this path eventually joins the path of bhakti.

A few important aspects of unfolding bhakti are not clearly indicated in the list. Meeting great yogis and saints is an important way of intensifying bhakti². It is implied if you serve a guru in the mode called *padasevanam*. This will be discussed shortly. Also important is constant reflection on one's nature and study of the scriptures. This is called *swadhyaya*. It is part of *jnana yoga*, though it is also included in Patanjali's *Yoga Sūtras*.

There are many sadhanas for awakening bhakti. The sadhana of the great bhakta Ramdas was called *mantra upasana* (worship through mantra). It includes the following four practices:

1. Continuous mental and verbal chanting of a mantra. In his case it was Sri Ram Jaya Ram Jaya Jaya Ram.
2. Visualization of the form of the guru in your heart.
3. Identification of every object on which the mind dwells with divinity. Whatever you think of, remember that it is the form of the supreme.
4. Observation of the mind. Take the attitude of watching the processes of the mind. This is awareness.

You will note the great similarity between his sadhana and the list we have given from the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. His method was a condensed version.

Another great help is to study and think about the infinite events occurring in nature. The sun rises and sets. The moon waxes and wanes. The flowers bloom, each variety almost simultaneously. The birds sing. The clouds float across the sky. Babies are born. An infinite number of magical events are occurring around us. A million pages could be written on this subject. Each event is a miracle. How do they happen? What is the force, the intelligence behind these multitudinous occurrences? Everything is a marvellous miracle. Let these things continually remind you of the wonder of existence. Let these things remind you of the supreme.

Try to do every action as a worship of the supreme. Let every thought be an expression of devotion. Offer your actions and thoughts to your guru or to the incarnation of the supreme that stirs your heart. This is the way to perfection.

Visualize and concentrate on a picture of any great saint, bhakta, yogi, sage, incarnation such as Guru Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Paramahansa Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi, Adi Sai Baba, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Sivananda, Swami Ramdas, Mohammed, any of the Sufi saints, Christ or any of the Christian saints such as St. Francis or St. Teresa, any of the Jewish saints, Buddha, Mahavir, Krishna, Rama, Milarepa and anyone you care to choose. Or you can

concentrate on your guru if you have one. The choice is yours, but there must be devotion.

In the *Uddhava Gita* Krishna instructs his disciple Uddhava: "Having withdrawn the senses (*pratyahara*) from contact with the surroundings, the devotee should concentrate on my form, especially one part such as my smiling face. Then he should be aware of my all pervading self which is free like the sky. Leaving that after some time, he should feel as though he is one with me, and stop thinking of all other things. He will see me, the *antaryamin* (the inner being) in himself, and himself in me like the light that is united with the fire. All doubts about matter, knowledge and action will completely cease."

Use any symbol of the supreme. This will take you beyond the symbol itself, if you have intensity and sincerity. It is difficult for most people to feel love (*prem*) for something intangible or impersonal. It is for this reason that a concrete form is used. Total absorption in the limited form or name will lead to the unlimited.

Ceaseless remembrance

Sleepiness is one main reason for low awareness. During or after yoga practices many people experience a feeling of joy, whether slight or intense. This comes because of the wakefulness, calmness and awareness which the practices give them. But this feeling is quickly lost when one continues on with one's daily duties. One becomes ensnared again in the ups and downs of everyday life, but this need not be the case. Through bhakti and continuous efforts to remember the object of devotion this awareness and joy can be maintained. Remembrance helps to prevent the relapse into automated living patterns and thought.

This ceaseless remembrance is a powerful practice for expanding awareness but it is not easy without devotion. Love and bhakti make a person remember. There has to be a natural attraction to the sweetness of the name (*mantra*) of one's deity. Bees are automatically attracted to the nectar in a flower.

This remembrance must be spontaneous. A man who is in love with his girlfriend or his wife cannot stop thinking about her. He does not need to try, he automatically thinks of his beloved. He has no choice but to remember.

A bhakta must remember God, his guru, his mantra or whatever with the same intensity. This remembrance must permeate one's whole being twenty-four hours a day. There are many cases of great bhaktas who were unable to stop remembering even when they were killed. It is said that when Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated he said only one thing: "Ram, Ram, Ram." His ceaseless remembrance continued even when he was dying. The following story illustrates the same thing.

The Great Indian Mutiny took place in 1857. Indian soldiers revolted against the British Government, which quickly took steps to quell the uprising. When people heard that British troops were advancing, whole villages were deserted in panic. At one place the fleeing villagers saw a sadhu coming their way. They warned him that the soldiers would kill him mercilessly if they saw him. But the sadhu paid no attention and continued on his journey. When the soldiers reached the village, one of them in blind fury bayoneted the sadhu. He was fatally injured. As the soldier withdrew his bayonet, the sadhu whispered with his last dying breath: "And you also are He." Even in the agony of death the sadhu saw his murderer as a form of divinity. Such is the power of continual remembrance.

Many of the great poets have beautifully illustrated this continual remembrance. For them the supreme is a helper, a dearest and nearest friend, nearer than breath, nearer than their own mind. This is beautifully expressed by Lord Tennyson:

*Speak to Him, thou, for He heareth
And spirit to spirit can speak.
Nearer is He than breathing,
Closer than hands and feet.*

When a person has this intensity of feeling, how is it possible not to remember? And this is the express train to expanded awareness. The great bhakta Ramdas said: "The quickest and easiest way to the supreme is to remember him always by repeating his sweet and powerful name." This name is a mantra. If you chant it verbally or mentally with awareness of its meaning, then it harmonizes the whole mind. One is less influenced by the ups and downs of the tumultuous world. One becomes more aware. The whole mind becomes concentrated

and powerful. This continual remembrance will break down the ego, body and mind identification. It will lead to knowledge and fulfilment. The great bhakta Kabir sang:

*I declare to the loud beat of a drum,
That with every breath that passes,
Without remembering the name of the Lord,
Thou art losing the chance to conquer
the three worlds,
The chance to reach those spiritual heights.*

This continual repetition of a mantra is called japa³. Try to repeat the mantra continuously. Try to remember throughout the whole day and night. If you cannot do this then at least remember the name with devotion in the morning when you awake and when you sleep at night. This will saturate the whole mind with positive thoughts and vibrations. With intensity, aspiration and bhakti the remembrance will become natural and spontaneous. You will want to remember, for the name is associated with your prem. It is the focal point of all your emotions and feelings. One becomes intoxicated with the very thought of the *ishta devata* (personal deity). You must try to hear and feel divinity everywhere. This is what the Sufi Hafiz meant when he said:

*On the tablet of the universe is no letter save
Thy name.
By which name, then shall we invoke Thee.
Thine, Thine alone!*

You must try to see divinity in every part of the world around you without exception. You must try to feel this in your heart. This is the way to union with the inner world of knowledge.

It is not necessary to read countless numbers of scriptures. You don't need to practise one thousand and one different yogic practices. Only saturate yourself with relentless repetition and remembrance of any holy name of the supreme. Your whole being has to be submerged, soaked and overwhelmed with the continuous repetition of the mantra. There has to be complete surrender. You have to feel divinity everywhere. Love intensifies this remembrance. Love means constant awareness. And this devotion means that there will be unceasing thirst, unforgettable remem-

brance and unswerving aspiration to unite with one's ishta. This practice should not be done occasionally during prayers, but twenty-four hours a day. You should remember each and every moment, with every heartbeat, with every breath and with every action. This is the path of bhakti yoga.

It is said that when you unceasingly chant the name of the supreme, he will chase you. Kabir sang:

*I have regained my pristine condition,
It is indescribable.
My mind has become crystal clear,
like the water of the Ganges.
God himself keeps following me
and calling O Kabir.*

Only a person who has merged in the exalted state of samadhi could say this. His main sadhana was continual remembrance, but it seems that when he sang the above song he had left all sadhanas behind. His path of devotion with continual remembrance had launched him into the transcendental realms.

External and internal worship

People often wonder whether it is best to worship inside or outside, that is, mental worship or the worship of external forms. Actually one should do both. However, most people cannot practise internal worship by visualizing an inner image so they worship external forms. They go to the temple and worship. There is nothing wrong with this at all. The purpose is to lead to devotion to a particular form. If the external worship develops bhakti towards a specific form then this is a good way to begin on the bhakti path. This specific form can then be worshipped internally. The purpose of both external and internal worship is the inducement of meditation. From this will come spontaneous worship of both the inner and outer environment. It will be seen that there is not really much difference between them.

The best approach is to worship both in the outside and the inside worlds, but with awareness. One should act and worship in the outer world through detached work – karma yoga. At the same time one should try to introvert awareness through hatha yoga and raja yoga. This is the integral approach.

Bhakti and the guru

If you have a guru then bhakti is essential. It is the essence of the relationship. Without bhakti the guru-disciple relationship cannot exist. If you have a guru and you feel no devotion, then he is not really your guru. It is better to find another one. Without bhakti, the disciple is not receptive to the instructions and vibrations of the guru and the guru is not able to transmute the gross nature of the disciple into a more subtle form. At first this devotion may be unconscious; you may not recognize it, but it must exist. There has to be a natural attraction.

The path towards perfection is difficult and hazardous. If has been aptly described as the razor's edge: if you go too far to one side or the other you fall into the chasm of delusion. The path is straight and narrow. It is the guru who shows the disciple how to avoid or overcome obstacles and blocks. It is easy to become lost in false, unrealistic thoughts and feelings. This applies not only to bhakti yoga but all other paths as well. It is easy to become side-tracked into blind alleys. The guru must lead the way. As Kabir said ecstatically: "If the Lord and the guru were to stand in front of us at the same time, at whose feet should we prostrate ourselves? The answer is definite – we should prostrate at the guru's feet, for it is he who has shown us the Lord. This would never be but for the guru's grace." Such was the feeling of bhakti that Kabir had for his guru.

In the *Kulamava Tantra* it says: "The fire of devotion to the guru burns away all taint of bad thought." "As steady devotion to the guru grows, so does one's self-knowledge." (ch: 8) Such is the power of bhakti towards guru. But this bhakti must be spontaneous. It cannot be created. In this respect it is the same as bhakti towards a deity – it must arise directly from the heart. It cannot come from mere logical analysis.

So if you have a guru, surrender all your actions and aspirations to him. Actually he does not need anything from you, but you have to offer all to him. Attend satsang with the guru². This has been praised by scriptures throughout the world. Whenever a wise man, a saint, a yogi or any person with higher awareness is in your area, go and visit him. Or when you have time make a point of

travelling to any great spiritual master. This is a method of breaking down and throwing out false concepts and dogmas. It is a method of channelling your thoughts and aspirations in new directions, often at a tangent with current aspirations. It is a method of being saturated with powerful vibrations and inspiration. Such is the power of satsang.

And when you sit with any wise man or your guru, be quiet and listen, for it is he who will pull you out of the quagmire of delusion. You may be a famous person, a noisy person, a clever person, an argumentative person or whatever, but be quiet, be still and listen. Every word that the guru says is full of meaning and significance.

Bhakti and music

Thoughts are the language of the mind. But music is the language of the heart. Wherever there is bhakti there must also be music. They are inseparable. There is no more exhilarating way of expressing bhakti than through music.

Music implies rhythm and harmony. And in this sense everything in the universe can be considered to be music. The sun and the moon rise and set according to fixed rhythms. This is music. The birds sing beautiful melodies. This is music. In fact, the birds are so anxious to express themselves that as soon as dawn breaks, or even earlier, they all burst into song. There seems to be a build-up of intensity in the early morning before this time and then all the birds joyfully express their feelings of bliss. The crops and the climate change cyclically according to the fixed rhythm of the seasons. This is music. The body functions in accordance with fixed rhythms. This too is music. Everything in life is really a form of music. The life of each individual should also be like beautiful music, with perfect harmony and spontaneous joy. But usually this is not the case; most people live a life that is like a bad composition or a discordant song. Life is disharmonious instead of harmonious. As a result there is unhappiness, discontent and disease. You should try, or at least aspire, to conduct your life as though it is a perfect piece of music. This can be achieved through bhakti yoga and other forms of yoga.

For a bhakta life should be a continuous symphony whether he is high or low, whether he is working or sleeping, whether he is

happy or angry. All the ups and downs of life are mere ripples on the river or ocean of bliss. Everything is an expression of inner joy, whether it is anger or laughter. The whole life of an intense bhakta is like beautiful music. And in fact vast numbers of bhaktas have expressed this inner bliss with their internal singing and music. Other people have been thrilled with the devotion and joy that pervades and resonates with every note and every word that they sing. But for the bhakta, music does not only mean music or singing – it means the whole flow of life. Life is one continuous song.

There is an inner music of the heart which is functioning ceaselessly, no matter what the outside events. One should follow the dictates of this inner symphony. This inner music should guide your life. It should decide your actions. But it can only come when you are receptive, when your mind and heart become sufficiently tuned.

Most people don't perceive this inner music, but it is clear if you care to listen. If you perfectly tune a radio to a broadcasting station and turn up the volume to full blast, then there is no mistake in perceiving the sound. It is the same with the inner music. When you hear it, then there is no doubt. This inner music is the music of knowledge, the music of bliss.

People of modern times have been seduced into always being in the audience. People watch television, cinema, sports and many other festivities without ever taking an active part. This is a great pity, for the most enjoyable part of life is participation. It is the same with music – people tend to listen rather than take part. And in this way the exhilarating experience of involvement is lost. If possible, try to join a collective group of singers. In India this is called *kirtan*. Try to be there in the middle and become totally involved. You don't need a good voice, it is the enthusiasm that is important. This kirtan generates an upsurge of group feeling. It is wonderful for removing stress and inducing relaxation. It helps to purify the mind and gives an outlet to emotions. It helps to unfold bhakti. One's feelings (bhava) are heightened. This leads to heightened bhava on a more permanent basis.

Devotional music is powerful. In the right environment it can generate such intense devotional vibrations that even the least

devotional type of person will be moved to feel bhakti, no matter how little. So next time you find time, join any group of people that is concerned with collective singing. Or alternatively start your own group. If you cannot do these things then start singing to yourself, whether aloud or mentally. What is the difference?

We don't want to say anything more about the subject of music, whether inner or outer, for music is not to be discussed. It is definitely to be experienced.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

² Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 1

³ For further details on japa refer to Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5 and Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6

⁴ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

The asana that we will describe in this topic is not widely practised, yet it has a number of distinctive benefits. It is called *kandharasana* (shoulder pose).

KANDHARASANA (SHOULDER POSE)

The Sanskrit word *kandha* means 'shoulder'. Hence this asana is usually translated as 'the shoulder pose'. It is so called because in the final pose most of the weight of the body is supported on the shoulders.



Technique

Lie flat on your back.

Bend your legs at the knees and place the feet so that the heels are near or touching the buttocks.

The feet should be flat on the floor, slightly separated.

Grasp the ankles with your hands.

Relax the whole body.

Then breathe in deeply.

While holding the breath raise your buttocks and arch the back upwards.

Try to push your navel and chest as high as possible but while keeping the feet flat on the floor.

Accentuate the flexion of the back by pushing the chest in the direction of the head; this can be done by trying to further straighten the legs.

Don't strain.

This is the final position.

The body is supported by the feet, arms, shoulders and head.

Remain in the final pose for a short comfortable length of time while holding the breath.

Then slowly lower the body to the starting position on the ground.

This is 1 round.

Rest for a short time and then repeat the practice.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Retain the breath inside while raising the body and staying in the final pose; exhale while lowering the body to the starting position.

Awareness should be on the movement and breathing. In the final pose one should be aware of accentuating the flexion of the back.

The asana can be practised as many times as you wish. For general health purposes five rounds is reasonable. For specific treatment of ailments one can practise the alternative method to be described shortly for prolonged periods of time.

Sequence

This asana can be used as a counterpose for forward bending asanas.

Limitations

Women in advanced stages of pregnancy should not practise *kandharasana*. However, after childbirth practise of this asana will help the abdomen resume its normal shape.

People with peptic or duodenal ulcers or abdominal hernia should also not practise this asana.

Alternative method

If you wish you can remain in the final pose while breathing slowly and deeply. This is particularly useful for treating some of the ailments we will discuss in the next heading.

Benefits

This asana is very useful for correcting spinal defects. If there is a displaced spinal disc then

this asana will help to push the disc into proper alignment. It is also useful for removing backache and for eliminating round shoulders or any tendency to stoop. It tones the nerves of the entire back.

It applies a good massage to the abdominal organs and so improves digestion. It also applies a strong pressure in the region of the pelvis, especially if the legs are used to accentuate the flexion of the back in the final pose. This massages and tones the nerves, muscles and organs of the reproductive system. This applies mainly to women. It is an excellent asana for helping to alleviate sexual malfunctions and to prevent any tendency towards miscarriage in childbirth.

The asana makes the whole back more flexible in a backward direction. For this reason it is an excellent preparatory asana for the more difficult chakrasana¹.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

Pranayama: Practice

From the primal sound all creation arose in the form of prana. Scientifically sound is caused by vibrations of a particular quality. The effect of sound is to produce physical change in an organism. Sound is energy. It has been concentrated to such degrees of intensity that objects have been shattered and destroyed. From the knowledge that sound has certain subtle qualities the rishis heard and formulated the mantras and bija mantras.

Principles of sound and the ability to use sound were known to ancient peoples. The great stones of Stonehenge, Easter Island and the Mayan monuments were moved into place using principles of sound now lost to modern civilization. The energy content of the mantra or revealed sound is a subtle form of prana.

Pranayama is a practice for intensifying the meditative technique of nada yoga¹. This is indicated by the following quotation: “Proper retention of breath activates the digestive fire and magnifies the astral sounds (nada) . . . ” (*Yoga Chudamani* v. 99)

Pranayama makes one more sensitive to the inner environment. In this way one is more able to perceive the subtle nada. For this reason try to practise nada yoga immediately after pranayama practice, if it is possible.

Integration of jalandhara bandha with nadi shodhana stage 4 (continued)

The practice from the last lesson is quite advanced². Therefore, we suggest that you continue to practise using the ratio 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 combined with jalandhara bandha at both the phase of inner retention and outer retention of breath. If necessary you can integrate ashwini mudra with the practice³. Don't strain.

Notes

¹ Topic 4 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 4

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Meditation: Nada Yoga (Part 1)

Nada yoga is a distinct path of yoga. It is closely related to mantra yoga, japa yoga, music and any other path that is concerned with sound. In fact, nada yoga is often used as a collective term to describe all yogic practices which use sound. However, in our definition nada yoga is regarded as having one characteristic feature. In the other paths a specific sound is created as a vehicle of awareness. That is, one chants a particular mantra in mantra yoga and japa yoga, and makes a fixed pattern of sound in music and singing. In nada yoga, as we teach it, one does not create a specific sound as such, but listens to internal sounds allowing the perceived sound to arise spontaneously. This is an obvious though fine difference. In later stages these paths join with each other, for they are all concerned with merging with the reservoir of sound – the underlying substratum.

Nada yoga is a simple yet powerful practice. It is a method of tracing sound back through its psychic and more subtle manifestation to the source.

Nada yoga is an important sadhana of many sects. These include Radha Soami Satsang, Kabirpanthis and many others. Nada is known by many different names. It is called *shabda* (sound), *surat* (sound), *nam* (name), *akashvani* (sound of the ether), *dhun* (tune), *Nad-i-asmani* (the heavenly harmony), *vani* (word), the word, holy spirit, the holy ghost, logos and many other names. In Zoroastrianism it is called *sraosha*. It is widely discussed and praised in the holy scriptures of the Sikhs, the *Adi Granth Sahib*. It is also the 'music of the spheres' described by the Greek mystic Pythagorus. He conceived the whole universe and each individual as a monochord, with its single string connected at the lower end to gross matter and at the upper end to pure consciousness. In between were all the different layers of subtle energy or nada. This relates directly to nada yoga, for the aspirant first perceives

gross sound at the lower end of the string and gradually moves along the string with perception of progressively subtler sound. Eventually this sound leads to the upper end of the string or pure consciousness. This is the path of nada yoga. Incidentally it is said that Socrates and other Greek mystics used nada as a means to transcendence.

According to traditional yogic scriptures, *nada brahman* (transcendental sound) is the seed of the manifested world from the gross to the subtle and from the visible to the invisible. Nada is flowing in the living and the nonliving, in the trees, grass, animals, everywhere. This concept is an integral part of tantra and Hinduism in general. It is also mentioned in the first verse of the Gospel according to St. John in the Christian Bible where nada is called 'the word'.

Modern science is also starting to postulate that everything in the universe is composed of wave forms at all levels of subtlety and vibratory rates. This applies to light, X-rays, radio waves, material bodies and so forth. It includes the vibration of the atoms, molecules, stones, flowers and the human body and mind. They are all vibrating at a multitudinous number of different frequencies. It also includes colours that can be seen and colours not seen, sounds that can be heard and sounds not heard, odours that can be smelt and odours not smelt, things that can be felt and things not felt and substances that can be tasted and those which cannot be tasted. They are all formed from vibratory wave form. All materials that you see can be regarded as solidified vibration. A good way to illustrate this is to consider a humming-top. When it spins very fast it appears to be stationary. Any person who has seen a stroboscope in action will have seen a similar phenomena: a body vibrating at high frequency appears to be stationary. These analogies illustrate how nonsolid bodies appear to be solid. Here we

are not trying to prove anything, only that the outside world is not really what it appears to be at normal levels of awareness. By raising one's level of awareness one begins to see the external world as it really is.

This outside world composed of vibration is called the *mahakasha* (great ether). In nada yoga we are specifically concerned with the inner ether, the *chidakasha*. Nada is the sound of the *chidakasha*, but this sound means far more than the sound we hear in the external world. This inner nada operates on different levels of subtlety. The aim is to use this inner sound as a vehicle of awareness so that one can transcend normal limitations and dive deep into the mind. Complete absorption in the inner sound makes one oblivious to outside sounds and disturbances, and this leads to *pratyahara* (withdrawal of awareness from the sense organs and outside world). When the mind flows towards the sound then it becomes very concentrated. Nada yoga is the link to expanded awareness. It leads directly to meditation.

Nada yoga is a part of *laya yoga*, the path in which one becomes totally absorbed in one thing. In the case of nada yoga one becomes totally aware of inner sound. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "Countless methods of laya yoga have been described but amongst them *nadanusandhana* (discovery of inner sound) is the best", (4:66) This clearly indicates the importance of nada yoga.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *nada* means 'to flow'. In this context it means a 'flow of consciousness'. The word is closely related to the word *nadi*, which means a pathway of pranic flow within the human framework. Generally the word *nada* is understood as sound, for it is the inner sound that is used as a focal point of awareness in retracing the flow of consciousness back to the source.

Scriptural references

There are countless references to nada in ancient scriptures throughout the world. Of the Indian texts, it is fully discussed in the following: *Nada Bindu Upanishad*, *Dhyana Bindu Upanishad*, *Shiva Mahapuranam*, *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Yoga Taravali*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Granth Sahib* and many more. The following quotations are merely a selection:

"In the early stages of the practice, the aspirant hears gross, loud sounds. Gradually more subtle sounds are heard. The sounds are like those of the ocean, clouds . . ." *Nada Bindu Upanishad*

"Nam (nada) is the true nectar (divine bliss), but nothing can be said about it. Only he who merges with it can drink and know this nectar." "In the same way that the fragrance is in the flower and a reflection is in a mirror, so the nam (nada) is within you. Seek it in your own being." *Granth Sahib*

It was Kabir who said: "The nada is within. It is music without strings played within the body. It pervades inside and outside and leads you away from illusion." And also: "Close your eyes, ears and mouth. Listen to the subtle inner nada."

There is also a well known and often quoted allegory in the *Bhagavata Purana*, which is well worth giving here because of its beauty: "Lord Krishna left his place at midnight and went into the jungle. It was a full moon night in the first month of winter. He began to play his flute. The echo of the flute permeated the calm and undisturbed atmosphere. The music was heard by the gopis (cowherd girls). They immediately left their houses and their husbands and forgot all their duties and past life. They ran straight to the place where the nada of the flute was being played. They started to dance around the flute player. After some time each of the gopis discovered that she was dancing with Krishna."

This story is symbolic and illustrates the path of nada yoga. The nada from the flute is heard at midnight, which is the best time to practise nada yoga. Krishna is higher consciousness. The sound of the flute is the nada that arises from the underlying consciousness. The gopis represent the aspirant and the senses, both of which are normally overwhelmed and distracted by day to day worldly life. But when the inner nada (sound of the flute) is heard then the awareness is directed inwards towards Krishna (pure consciousness). Eventually the gopis merge with Krishna – they tune in with pure consciousness. This is the path of nada yoga.

Sitting position

There are two good sitting positions in which to practise nada yoga. These are as follows:



1. Any of the *traditional meditative asanas*¹. In this position the ears should be plugged with the index fingers of each hand. The other fingers should be lightly clenched and the elbows held sideways and horizontal. This position is shown above. The only disadvantage of this pose is that the arms quickly become tired. Of course with practice one can hold the arms in the fixed position for prolonged periods of time, but there is always a limit. This problem is diminished with sitting position number 2.

2. *Nadanusandhana asana*. You should squat on a rolled up mattress, cushion or thick blanket in the way shown. Adjust the height of the mattress so that the sitting position is comfortable and the back reasonably straight. The mattress must be sufficiently firm and round so that it presses the area of the perineum, that is, the area between the anus and the sexual organs. Rest the elbows on the knees and place the palms of the hands on each side of the head so that the fingers rest on the side and top of the head. The thumbs should be gently but firmly



pushed into the ears. Make sure that this position is comfortable before starting the practice, if necessary further adjusting the height of the mattress. The feet should be flat on the floor. Alternatively, if you wish you can close the ears with the index fingers.

Technique

There are two stages as follows:

Stage 1: Bhramari Pranayama

Though this practise is called a pranayama, it is really more of a meditation practice. It is not directly related to controlling prana as are other forms of pranayama. The word *bhramari* means 'bee'. The practice is so called because a sound is made which imitates the sound of a humming bee. It is a method of harmonizing the mind and directing awareness inwards in preparation for the second stage.

The method is as follows:

Sit in any of the poses that we have already described, with the ears plugged.

It is important to make sure that the ears are firmly closed for best results.

If necessary adjust your body to make sure that you are perfectly comfortable.

Face forwards and hold the spine as straight as possible.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body.

Keep the teeth slightly separated and the mouth closed throughout the entire practice.

This allows the vibration to be heard and felt more distinctly in the brain.

Breathe in slowly and deeply.

Then while breathing out make a humming sound. The humming sound should be smooth and continuous, and should be done for the duration of the exhalation.

The humming sound need not be very loud; the important thing is that you hear the sound vibrating within your head.

The exhalation should be slow and controlled. At the end of exhalation, stop the humming sound and breathe in.

Again repeat the humming with the next exhalation.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

You should be aware of the humming sound and the breathing process throughout the practice.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: perception of subtle inner sound

In this stage there is no loud humming sound, only listening to the inner sound.

Continue to keep your eyes closed and your fingers gently, but firmly in your ears; this is necessary to block out external disturbances. Try to hear a sound in your head.

At first you may find this difficult, but try. As soon as you become aware of a sound, any sound, try to fix your awareness on it to the exclusion of other sounds.

Go on listening.

After some days or weeks of practise you should find that one sound is very distinct, becoming louder and louder.

Be totally aware of that sound.

This is your vehicle of awareness; let your awareness flow towards this sound leaving all other sounds and thoughts.

Gradually through practice your sensitivity will increase.

Eventually you will hear another sound, a faint sound, in the background; it will almost be obliterated by the main, louder sound that you are hearing, but you hear it nevertheless. You should now listen to the new faint sound, leaving the other louder sound and continue to listen to this new sound.

It will become more and more distinct.

This is the new, more subtle vehicle of your awareness.

Let this sound occupy your whole attention.

This will further increase your sensitivity of perception.

Eventually you will hear another faint sound emerging from behind this louder sound.

Fix your awareness on this new sound, discarding the other sound.

Continue in the same manner as already described allowing the sound to occupy your whole awareness.

When it becomes loud try to perceive a more subtle underlying sound and fix your awareness on this sound.

In this manner your perception will become progressively more sensitive.

It is in this manner that you can dive deep into your being.

Note: this needs to be practised over a period of weeks and months to bring results. Time is required to perceive these progressively subtler sounds. For many weeks you may be unable to hear even the first sound. All that is required is time and effort. It is a very simple but powerful technique that will bring results if you persevere.

Awareness and duration

In stage 1 awareness should be fixed on the vocalized humming sound and the breathing.

In stage 2 the awareness should be fixed on subtle sounds. If you cannot hear anything in the beginning then you must merely be receptive and try to hear any sound that arises.

Practise for as long as you have time. In the beginning try to devote at least fifteen minutes to the practice.

Time of practice

The best time to practise is late at night or early in the morning, because at this time there are fewer external noises that would interfere with internal perception. However, this time is not convenient for most people; therefore, you can choose any suitable time when the surroundings are peaceful. You must use your discretion in this respect. If you practise beside a blaring radio or in a room full of talking people, don't expect much success in your practice.

Incidentally, a good time to practise nada yoga is after a long spell of kirtan (collective singing and chanting).

Preparation for other practices²

Bhramari pranayama is an excellent method of settling the mind and removing gross tensions. It can therefore be used as a method of preparing the mind for other meditation practices, or simply as a method of gaining tranquillity during times of stress.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

² For part 2 of nada yoga refer to Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have given a long discussion on bhakti yoga. Remember: it is a powerful method of channelling emotions so that they become one-pointed, but only to be practised if you are devotionally inclined.

Try to integrate nada yoga, kandharasana and pranayama into your daily practice program as follows.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Kandharasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	20
Nada Yoga	—	20
Japa	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization	—	12
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Kandharasana	—	3

Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	15
Nada Yoga	—	15
Japa	—	12
Chidakasha Dharana with object visualization	—	5
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Yoga Mudra	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	10
Japa	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	7
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama and Jalandhara Bandha with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka	—	10
		30

Try to find some time during the day to practise kandharasana.

Lesson 18

Fortunate was Christ, who was crucified; fortunate were Socrates and Mansoor. What about Mira and Dayananda? How unfortunate are we, when we find ourselves allured by praises and favours, flowers and merits? Misfortune unsurpassed! When trials come at our door, we cry out aloud to help kick them away. Yea, we only kick divine chances. So do thou understand!

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Bhakti Yoga (Part 4)

This is the concluding discussion on bhakti yoga¹. You may be wondering why we are spending so much time and space on this subject. Bhakti is the means to harmonize and channelize the turbulent emotions. Much is said about harmonizing the body and mind. Most books on yoga are written on this subject. This integration of mind and body, of action and thought, has been the main theme of this book so far. Yet very little is ever said about harmonizing the emotions and integrating them with one's action and thoughts. These emotions are very powerful forces. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve mental and physical stability if the emotions are rampant. It is like trying to tame a wild tiger by pulling its tail. It cannot be done. How can a person attain mental peace if his emotions are like a stormy sea? There has to be a simultaneous process of harmonizing and integrating the body, mind and emotions, one's actions, thoughts and feelings. This is the only sure way of achieving fulfilment in life and expanding awareness.

The subject of stabilizing the emotions in man is usually forgotten or treated lightly as if emotions are non-existent. The attitude seems to be if the emotions cannot be tamed then pretend they don't exist, like the ostrich that buries its head in the ground when it senses danger. This may make it feel safer, but it does not prevent it being eaten by a lion. So if you want to harmonize your life, then it is useless being like the ostrich, and pretending that the emotions are non-existent. This attitude will lead nowhere, for the emotions are ever present. You may gain mental peace for short spells of time, but this tranquillity will be disturbed by the monsters of emotions when they show their ominous heads from the depths. Suppressed emotions eventually bubble to the surface and create disruptions. To gain lasting peace in life it is not sufficient to attain perfect physical health and some control

over the thoughts. The emotions must also be transformed so that they are in accord with every action and thought. Without gaining emotional harmony and one-pointedness it is impossible to gain mental and physical harmony.

You will now perhaps understand why we are spending so much time in explaining bhakti yoga. It is the most powerful means of harmonizing the emotions so that they work with the individual and not against him, so that they are used for constructive purposes.

The bhaktas of different religions

Every part of the world, every culture and every religion has had its share of bhakti intoxicated bhaktas. The religion of Judaism has had the bhaktas of the Old Testament and the vibrant followers of Hasidism. Christianity has had these plus bhaktas such as St. Teresa, St. Augustine, St. Francis and many more. Islam has had bhaktas such as Rabia of Basra, Junnuna Misri of Egypt, Attar, Rumi, Farid, Tabriz and many others. In India there has been an endless list of well-known bhaktas. Even Buddhism, which seems at first glance to have nothing in common with bhakti, has produced its fair share of ecstatic bhaktas.

Most of these great bhaktas initially worshipped the supreme consciousness in a particular form. It was from this that they realized the nature of that which is beyond form, and in fact that which is both beyond the formless and the formed, yet an integral part of everything. The common feature of all these well-known bhaktas is their compassion for all people and all things, no matter what circumstances prevailed. This applies to the bhaktas of all religions, though actually they are beyond any specific religion.

Most religions are predominantly bhakti in nature and teaching. An obvious exception is Buddhism, which is mainly a raja yoga and jnana yoga system. However, Buddhism too

has a well-known offshoot which chants the holy name of *amitabha*. And this bhakti aspect of religions is not surprising, for devotion is a powerful and natural expression of man. The state of highest consciousness is not the monopoly of any one religion – it is the culmination of all religions. It is only the name, the object of worship and the specific method that is different. The culmination of highest consciousness and the expression of bhakti is the same. All the scriptures only discuss the starting point and the mechanics. They cannot talk about the culmination, except in allegorical form. Religions are a method. Whether one worships Christ, Krishna or whoever, it does not really matter. They all signify the same thing and devotion to any of these incarnated forms can lead to higher states of awareness.

There are many artists who expressed bhakti through their work. Many poems, paintings and sculptures were produced by bliss-intoxicated bhaktas. Their masterpieces are an attempt to express the ineffable. Michaelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, William Blake, Rabindranath Tagore, the incredible tantric artists and sculptors of India and many more in all parts of the world tried to express and depict their feeling of divine love. The beauty and sensitivity of their masterpieces clearly shows this. Great works of art are not really made, they are divinely inspired by revelatory experience. They are an expression of the heart. They don't really require effort, they happen.

Next time you look at a work of art, or listen to a beautiful piece of music, think of the motivating force behind its composition. What was the reason for the inspiration? Next time you hear a story of a great sage, saint or yogi, reflect on the driving force behind his actions. What is it that made his actions so perfect and powerful? If you don't know what this force is, then we will tell you: it is overwhelming bhakti.

Christianity

Christianity and Judaism are mainly bhakti religions, though there is much esoteric data hidden in the *Bible* and other texts, and in various sects, japa is widely practised by various groups. An important mantra is *Kyrie Eleison*. Constant chanting, verbal or mental, with remembrance throughout the day and night, can lead to one-pointedness of mind and

transcendence. Such is the power of mantra combined with devotion.

Prayer is an important part of Christianity, as it is with most other religions. Prayer combined with devotion helps to purify the mind and reduce the power of the ego. This too can lead to greater levels of awareness. In a text called the *Philocalia* (a collection of early mystical Christian writings) St. Nilus says that the method of transcendence is the: "... collection of the mind from its wandering and quietly leading it to the heart by way of breathing, and by repeating the prayer, 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me', in harmony with the breath. This leads to unification with the one, the single and unifying, directly in a union which transcends reason." This is a method of bhakti yoga combined with breath awareness. It can be done while sitting for meditation practice or during everyday activities.

In Christianity, the focal point for bhakti is Christ. Most of the great Christian saints have made this clear and it is written in the mystical books. Christ also indicated the path of bhakti for his disciples.

The following are a few selected quotations of Christ: "Love thy neighbour as thyself." "Love thine enemy." This is urging aspirants to worship the supreme in other people. "No man cometh unto the Father (supreme consciousness) but by me." Although to some people this may sound dogmatic, its meaning is that devotion to Christ can lead to spiritual evolution. The very essence of Christianity is centred on devotion to the form, life and teachings of Christ.

The Old Testament of the *Bible* also strongly preaches the path of bhakti. For example it says in no uncertain terms: "Seek ye ever the face of God, and seek ye Him in all things, tarrying not until ye find him". (*Psalms* 105, 4) "Thou shalt love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind and with all thy soul and with all thy strength." (*Deuteronomy* 6, 5)

There have been many great Christian saints. One of the best known is St. Francis of Assisi, born in Italy at the end of the 12th century. It is he who said that 'idleness is the enemy of the soul'. And he practised what he preached for he continually did karma yoga, whether it was sweeping the floor or helping the poor. He was a great bhakta and his words have inspired many:

*All my will is burnt up with love,
Is united to love,
Is transformed into love,
Is consumed and consecrated by love.
Neither the fire nor the sword
Shall separate me from love.
Suffering and death never may rise
To the heights to which love doth lure me on
Outside the mystic union with love.
All created things are restless.
By love the soul is raised,
Is exalted, elevated above everything.*

This clearly shows the path and the culmination of bhakti. He also said: "With all thy heart love the love which loves thee, love the love which desires thee, and has created thee to draw thee wholly to Himself." He expressed his bhakti to everything – the birds, the animals, fellow humans – everything was included in his circle of bhakti. He referred to the sun as 'brother sun', regarding it as the image of the supreme. The moon and the wind were his sisters, as was everything else. He was definitely an intoxicated bhakta.

There are various books on bhakti in Christianity. A particularly practical one is the *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross. It is a bhakti scripture from cover to cover and gives sensible advice on the pitfalls on the path of bhakti. It also prescribes the ten steps on the bhakti path, which are very similar to those given in the Indian text, the *Srimad Bhagavatam*¹.

There are notable modern bhaktas. An example is Kahlil Gibran who wrote: "Who knows that your neighbour is your better self wearing another body? See that you love him as you would love yourself." "It is in your longing that you shall find the son of man (self-realization). For longing is the fountain-head of ecstasy, and is the path to our father (the supreme consciousness)."

Islam

Islam is almost entirely a devotional religion. It has produced Sufism which is noted for its intense bhaktas. Sufism emphasizes the use of dancing, music and singing. Its followers do prescribed dancing steps while chanting mantras. This purifies the heart and accentuates the feeling of bhakti. Awareness is heightened and the mind becomes more one-

pointed. The ego drops away and so in turn does the veil of delusion. This leads to eventual transcendence and realization.

The most well-known mantra used in Islam is *la ilaha illa'llah* which means 'there is no god but God'. This is repeated over and over again like japa. In Islam this process is called *zikr* and it is said that the *zikr* (remembrance), the *zakir* (person who remembers) and the *mazkur* (remembered one) become united through intense practice and devotion. This is exactly the same as in yoga and many other systems.

Eventually, with intense bhakti there arises an effortless flow of awareness to the object of devotion. This is called *fana*, and is comparable to dhyana or meditation. This eventually leads to *baqua* which is called samadhi in yoga. This is the exact parallel of raja yoga but in the field of bhakti yoga. Always there is emphasis on the ascent of devotion so that it can receive the descent of grace. This is similar to the concept used in the integral yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

There are innumerable well-known bhaktas in Islam and Sufism. As an example we will give a few quotations of Rabia of Basra, who was born in the 8th century in what is now Iraq. When she was a young girl she suffered from hunger, slavery and beatings. Nevertheless she became a bhakta and said:

*Beloved,
My aspiration is but one . . .
To remember thee and thee alone . . .
I have made thee the companion of my heart.
The groaning and the yearning of the lover
will continue
Until the heart has found its rest in the beloved.*

She also said: "One mark of the awakened mind is that it is centred in the supreme and will not wander after anything else. The mind that is absorbed in the service of the one has craving for nothing else."

We will end here with one poem by the Sufi Attar:

*Joy – joy – I triumph
Now no more I know
Myself as simply me.
I burn with love.
The centre is within me
And its wonder
Lies everywhere about me.*

*Joy – joy – no mortal thought can fathom me.
I am the merchant and the pearl – both.
Lo, time and space lie crouching at my feet.
Joy – joy – when I would in a rapture
Plunge into myself and all things know.*

Bhakti in Hinduism

There are vast numbers of sects and subsects, some of which are closely related and others that seem very different. All together they form a mixture that makes the Hindu religion seem confusing. As an illustration, we intend to briefly discuss one bhakti sect which worships Krishna. This will indicate the general trend of bhakti yoga in India².

Much of the doctrine of the vaishnavites (followers of Vishnu, including Krishna) is concerned with Krishna as a child in the town of Brindavan by the Yamuna River. The stories of his childhood pranks are recorded in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Stories of other parts of his life are given in scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita*. He is worshipped and adored by the gopis (cowherd girls) who were Krishna's greatest followers. They were intense bhaktas. Everything that they did, touched and saw was permeated with Krishna. They wallowed in his eternal sport which is unceasing and everywhere. It is said in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* that: "In every branch, leaf, flower and fruit I see Krishna and nothing else. Doors and walls have been transformed into mirrors. In every direction I see thee and thee alone. Pebbles, stones and lumps of earth have all been turned into so many looking glasses."

On one level of understanding the gopis represent the senses. These are directed entirely towards Krishna. The whole mind and heart is centred on Krishna, whether awake, sleeping, working, eating or whatever. This leads to spiritual awakening. On another level, the gopis symbolize Shakti – the manifested form of consciousness. In the *Padma Purana* Krishna says: "Sri Radha is my beloved – know her to be the supreme goddess. Surrounding her are thousands of her female companions (the gopis). Just as my own form is eternal, they too are eternal. My parents, friends, the cows and cowherds of Brindavan and Brindavan itself are eternal and made of pure consciousness and bliss." (*Patala Khand* 2:73–75) This means that worship of Krishna by the gopis and the devotion of any other person towards

Krishna (or any other deity) is of utmost intimacy because they are really worshipping the essence that is within.

The spiritual path shown by Krishna is the path of intense bhakti. It doesn't ask one to become an ascetic and practise austerities. One must only make the heart and mind unceasingly one-pointed. The story of Krishna's childhood also depicts the path that every person must pass along on the road to enlightenment and the obstacles that must be overcome.

Many people deny the historical authenticity of Krishna's life but actually this is totally irrelevant. The pastimes of Krishna are not intended to be historical. They are intended to transcend history. The games of Krishna, the *lilas*, portray and symbolize higher truths and encourage one to become a bhakta as a means to higher knowledge. If you are a bhakta, then Brindavan is really in your heart. You should become one of the gopis, with total devotion to Krishna or any other person, deity or symbol which acts as a magnet for your devotion. Listen to the music of Krishna's flute – this is the eternal, inner nada of each and everything in the universe. Krishna is the consciousness in each person, separate but also the same.

The essence of devotion to Krishna is summed up in the *Uddhava Gita* when Krishna says: "All the desires, which are rooted in the heart of the sage who worships me with the yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga), gradually wilt away and when he realizes me, the knot of ignorance which is lodged in the heart is destroyed. All his doubts are annihilated and his stock of karma is exhausted. Therefore, by bhakti yoga my devotee gains all that is gained by the other paths of yoga and by austerities, dispassion, charitable acts and pilgrimages."

The other bhakta systems of India follow the same basic pattern but with different deities and background.

Indian bhaktas

If we wrote about most of the known bhaktas of India then we would easily fill the rest of this book. It is possible to write an encyclopaedia on them. To give you an idea of the aspirations of these bhaktas we intend to give selected quotations from two great bhaktas – Kabir and Ramakrishna.

Kabir is one of the most famous bhaktas of India. The word *kabir* means 'great', and this

exactly describes this exuberant bhakti poet. He is often called *Kabirdas*, which means the slave or servant of the supreme.

He was born near Benares in 1440. His whole life was an expression of bhakti. He earned his living as a weaver. He sang countless songs, many of which have been recorded by his disciples. They all generate an atmosphere of devotion and bliss and are widely sung throughout India. And still, even though they were written hundreds of years ago, they continue to transmit overwhelming devotion and feeling. When these songs are sung the whole atmosphere is charged with the devotion of Kabir. The air becomes vibrant; the heart starts thumping with joy. This occurs even for those who do not understand the language.

For Kabir everything is blissful, as he sings in the following song:

*The supreme dances in rapture
And when his great joy
Touches the body and mind
They cannot contain themselves.
He holds all that is
Within his eternal bliss.*

Though he sang thousands of songs, he emphasized time and time again that it is impossible to talk or write about the supreme consciousness – it can be only tasted and felt. It is only in this way that you will know the sweetness of bliss. He sang:

*Since the day when I met my Lord,
There has been no end to the play of our love;
I see with my eyes open and I smile
And I behold his beauty everywhere.
I utter his name, and whatever I see,
It reminds me of him.
Whatever I do, it becomes his worship,
Wherever I go, I move in him.
All I achieve is his service and grace.
When I lie down, I lie prostrated at his feet.
It is only he that I adore – none other;
My tongue no longer utters useless words,
It only sings his glory day and night.
Whether sitting or standing,
I can never forget him
For the rhythm of his music beats in my ears.
Kabir says: I am totally immersed in the
intoxicating bliss that transcends pleasure and
pain.*

Remember, this is only a translation. In the original language, with music and amid a large group of people singing, the power of devotion is electrifying.

Kabir was a practical man. He advised aspirants to: “. . . go to the master, receive the word (mantra) and worship the Lord. This leads to liberation, declares Kabir most emphatically.”

*As the oil is in the oil seed
And the fire in the flint
So the supreme is within thee, unrevealed.
Follow the guru's simple and true instructions.
Keep strict vigil at midnight and so find him.*

Kabir was not a person of blind faith. He had transcended all religious barriers. In his poems he continually tries to show people that there is no contradiction between Hinduism and Islam. He had reached the culmination of all yogic paths. Knowledge and devotion were the result of expanded awareness. He sang:

*The inward and the outward have become
as one sky;
The infinite and the finite are united;
I am drunk with the sight of this all.*

If you want to know more we suggest you read a book which gives translations of Kabir's songs. We recommend *Poems of Kabir* translated by Rabindranath Tagore.

The second bhakta we will briefly discuss is Ramakrishna. He was born near Calcutta in 1836. He is a good example to show that illumination does not depend on education. He was illiterate, yet through bhakti, merged with highest knowledge. Because of this, his power of intellect became very powerful, and many highly educated people would sit and listen to his words. The educated came to an uneducated person for guidance and wisdom; this almost seems to defy understanding. Many of his disciples, such as Vivekananda received extensive education, yet they adopted Ramakrishna as their guru. Higher awareness does not depend on formal education.

Ramakrishna worshipped the form of the supreme as Kali, the divine mother. She represents the dissolution of life, pain and darkness, as well as loving kindness, protection and bliss. Kali is both loving and stern. He

continuously reflected on her image and attributes, day and night. His bhakti was such that he could not stop thinking of her. Eventually, he saw her everywhere and in everything. This was his path to illumination.

He was often asked by people: what is the way to the supreme? His answer was sharp and definite: bhakti yoga. He said time and time again that bhakti yoga is the best sadhana for the *Kali Yuga* (Dark Age) of the present. His bhakti is illustrated by the following statement he made to a disciple:

To my divine mother I prayed only for pure love.

At her lotus feet I offered a few flowers

and I prayed:

Mother! here is virtue and here is vice;

Take them both from me.

Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.

Mother! here is knowledge and here is ignorance;

Take them both from me.

Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.

Mother! here is purity and impurity;

Take them both from me.

Grant me only love, pure love for Thee.

Ramakrishna, like Kabir, was a practical man. He said: "So long as passions are directed towards the world and its objects, they are enemies. But when they are directed towards a deity, then they become the best of friends to man, for they take him to illumination. The desire for worldly things must be changed into longing for the supreme; the anger which you feel for fellow man must be directed towards the supreme for not manifesting himself to you . . . and so on, with all other emotions. The passions cannot be eradicated, but they can be turned into new directions."

A disciple once asked him: "How can one conquer the weaknesses within us?" He answered: "When the fruit grows out of the flower, the petals drop off themselves. So when divinity in you increases, the weaknesses of human nature will vanish of their own accord." He emphasized that the aspirant should not give up his practices. "If a single dive into the sea does not bring you a pearl, do not conclude that there are no pearls in the sea. There are countless pearls hidden in the sea. So if you fail to merge with the supreme during devotional practices, do not lose heart. Go on patiently with the practices, and in time you will invoke

divine grace." It does not matter what form you care to worship. He said: "Many are the names of the supreme and infinite are the forms through which he may be approached. In whatever name and form you choose to worship him, through that he will be realized by you." He indicated the importance of surrender on the path of bhakti when he said: "As dry leaves are blown hither and thither by the wind, without any choice of their own, so a bhakta also moves in harmony with His will." And to further illustrate surrender he uttered: "Not I, not I, Thou . . . Thou."

Ramakrishna saw the supreme in everything. He once said: "I have come to the stage of realization in which I see the supreme is walking in every human form, manifesting himself alike through the sage and the sinner, the virtuous and the vicious. Therefore, when I meet different people, I say to myself: the supreme in the form of a saint, the supreme in the form of a sinner, the supreme in the form of righteousness, the supreme in the form of unrighteousness."

While discussing Ramakrishna, it is worthwhile mentioning his disciple Vivekananda. He was a great sceptic who believed and accepted nothing. He was a jnana yogi and he followed his natural inclinations. But his path of non-acceptance eventually led him to experiences that transformed him into a bhakta. In his speeches and books he continually praised the divinity that he saw around him.

Buddhism

Bhakti is rarely associated with Buddhism. But actually Buddha himself was the epitome of a bhakta. He was said to be ever blissful. He was even known as the 'compassionate one' which surely implies bhakti. Wherever he went he radiated love. Though he did not preach bhakti yoga as a method, he himself was a perfect example of an intoxicated bhakta. The same also applies to Buddhism; it does not teach bhakti yoga as a path, for it is easily misused and can lead to blind superstition, but its prescribed paths eventually lead to the experience of bhakti.

It is said that Buddha urged his disciples to have faith. But this is not blind faith in dogmas or the scriptures. It is faith in the existence of a higher reality, of the possibility of attaining liberation and knowledge.

One of the Buddha's basic teachings is that the world is full of suffering. This is not a statement of despair but is a means to wake people up to their current way and quality of life. It was intended to give people a kick so that they questioned their unhappiness and started to seek higher levels of being. The aim of Buddhism is the same as all other systems – supreme knowledge. It is only the methods that appear to differ. Yet its methods are basically *raja yoga* and *jnana yoga*. The culmination of these practices leads to the knowledge of equality and sameness of all people and all things. This is called *samata jnana* in Pali. This leads to all embracing compassion for everyone. This is *bhakti*, not the path, but the experience. Also one of the well-known *dhyana* Buddhas symbolizes *bhakti*. This is *Ratna-Sambhava* – the jewel born, who represents the outgoing love that arises because of the realization of the essential unity of all things and beings.

There is a very popular Buddhist *bhakti* sect in Japan called *Jodo* – the Fair Land School. They worship *Amida* (Amitabha, the infinite light) a personification of the source of all revelations and intuitions. *Amida* is associated with forty-eight vows, one of which is that he will not attain enlightenment until, by his enlightenment, all other beings will also gain enlightenment. Worship of *Amida* helps to break down ego motives and to have respect for the wellbeing of others. The mantra *amitabha* is repeated over and over again. This is the same method as other forms of *bhakti yoga* and is a form of *japa yoga*. Keeping *Amida* continually enshrined in his heart, the aspirant is compelled to think of others and not become lost in his own experiences. Remembrance of *Amida* helps to break down selfishness. Of course, it has much more significance, which we will not discuss here.

It is worthwhile giving a short story from the life of a great *Jodo bhakta* called *Shoma*. He was a poor labourer who lived in Japan in the 19th century. The following story is recorded in a book on his life: "He once went to a Buddhist temple in the countryside. He entered the main door and immediately relaxed and rested in front of the shrine of *Amida*. One of his friends was astonished for he thought that *Shoma* had no respect for *Amida*. *Shoma* replied: 'I am back in my parent's home, and

for you to think as you do, you must be a stepchild'."

Shoma was totally happy in the embrace of the great compassionate heart of *Amida*. This story is very similar to the stories of *bhaktas* in other religions: the surrender of the devotee to the divine.

There are many more examples in Buddhism, but we have said enough. However, we would like to point out that Zen Buddhism and certain sects of Tibetan Buddhism emphasize the importance of a guru. In fact, there are many stories, such as that of *Milarepa*, where the disciple undergoes great hardship under the instructions of a guru. It is difficult to imagine that the disciple would be able to tolerate such hardships without *bhakti* for his guru.

A summary of *bhakti yoga*

We have written much about *bhakti yoga*. But the flow of ideas on the subject kept coming and coming. There seems to be no end, and even now there are countless other things that could be said. But at this point it is time to stop, and give you a chance to follow the path of *bhakti yoga* for yourself if you are devotionally inclined.

Each of us has emotions. They are a normal part of the human makeup. But few people can direct and focus these emotions in one direction and towards positive and constructive purposes.

Each person is looking for a suitable object or person on which to express and focus their emotions. This occurs either consciously or unconsciously and is the case with both the obviously emotional person and the seemingly unemotional person. It is in this search for a suitable focal point for emotions and feeling that people rush wildly after so many things in life, and as a result their emotions are needlessly dissipated. Others, who have met with severe and traumatic rebuffs in their efforts to express emotions, tend to suppress them. This is a great problem in life and there is only one positive method of solving it: one must try to focus all the emotions on one thing. The emotions have to be channelled in one direction. Some people do this by directing all their emotions into their work. There is nothing wrong with this, providing you follow as closely as possible the principles of *karma yoga*⁹. If you don't then the emotions will rebound and

once again cause you disturbances. The best method is to direct all one's emotions towards one subject or object of veneration. One should try and convert emotions into devotion and surrender and dedicate all one's aspirations to the object of devotion. One should offer all the fruits of actions, either spiritually or mentally. This is bhakti yoga, but it is not easy.

Bhakti yoga is often regarded as being very different from other forms of yoga, but this is not really true. In hatha yoga, the mind is made one-pointed by awareness of the breath or different parts of the body. In raja yoga the mind is made one-pointed by awareness of a fixed symbol or a psychic centre. In jnana yoga the mind is made one-pointed by total absorption in an enquiry. In karma yoga the mind becomes concentrated by complete absorption in one's work. In bhakti yoga the same result, namely one-pointedness of the mind, is achieved through love and devotion. If there is devotion towards one thing, then all the energy of the mind will also flow in the same direction. Love is probably the strongest force for concentrating the mind. The greater the love then the greater the concentration.

All the paths of yoga lead to dhyana (meditation). Bhakti can intensify the effectiveness of other paths of yoga, for if you feel devotion towards something, then your attention and interest will automatically flow in that direction without any effort. There will be a natural attraction towards the object of love. For many people, it is difficult to maintain awareness of the breath or the psychic centres or whatever during hatha yoga and raja yoga practices, because there is no natural attraction. The awareness is distracted in other directions, preventing success in one's yogic sadhana. But if you feel devotion and love for an object, then you will have no choice but to be aware. The object of devotion will overwhelm your whole being. This is the way to success in yoga.

Remember, if you are not devotionally inclined then don't force yourself to follow the path of bhakti. If you are a doubter, then please remain a doubter. Don't try to become a bhakta. But if you are a doubter then let the doubt be so overwhelming that it forces you to make an effort to seek answers to life and your own nature. If your doubt is strong enough then it will force you to practise some of the

paths of yoga, though not bhakti yoga. Or your doubt will force you to find some other means to either confirm or remove your scepticism.

In this case your doubt can be positive. But if you doubt and take no steps to find answers from personal experience, then nothing will be gained. By all means doubt . . . doubt everything. Accept nothing. This is a good method of clearing away the cobwebs of false thinking from the mind. Eventually you may be surprised to find that you have become a bhakta spontaneously.

Bhakti yoga is one of the most powerful methods of inducing meditation. If you are swept away by a powerful current of bhakti, then you will find that meditation will arise naturally. It will come about as a natural consequence of having a concentrated mind. So if you feel devotion whether it is tangible or intangible, let it be the supercharger that launches you into the realms of superconsciousness. It is said that there are two types of fools: the ignorant fool and the fool who is saturated with bhakti. But the happiness of the bhakta is infinitely greater than the ignorant fool, because it is based on love and knowledge. So if you follow the path of bhakti yoga, you may find that you have become a fool . . . but a wise, blissful one.

Intense bhakti will induce the joy of meditation. One becomes the perfect receptacle of the divine nectar. You will come face to face with yourself. Do you know the root of the word 'personality'? It comes from the word persona. It means 'a mask', or 'an appearance'. Therefore, your personality, your individuality, is a mask, a shell of something much greater. Bhakti yoga is a method of seeing behind that mask, of seeing behind your limited personality. Follow the path of bhakti, and then . . .

Notes

¹ Bhakti Yoga: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Part 3 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1

² For more information on the subject of tantra refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 6

³ For full details on karma yoga refer to Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

Balancing asanas are an important group of asanas which we have not yet introduced in this course. These asanas develop the coordination between the muscles of the body, so that the individual is able to perform physical movements more gracefully and more efficiently. Many people lack synchronization between the muscles. The different muscles seem to hinder more than help each other. This means that more effort and energy are required to do less work. To attain a specific movement of any part of the body, there has to be perfect timing between the relevant muscles and between the nerves that activate the muscles. Some muscles and nerves must even act in opposition, partially blocking the required movement, so that the resulting movement is graceful and well directed. All movements of the body, no matter how small, are controlled by means of various nerve pathways to the brain. These nerve pathways ensure that the muscles relax or contract to exactly the correct degree to attain perfect muscular response and thereby perfect movement.

The brain centre that controls all movements of the body is called the cerebellum. It is located at the back of the head behind the top of the spine. All asanas help to develop and harmonize this centre by encouraging control of body movements. That is, to practise asanas it is necessary to develop a greater degree of muscular control, which has repercussions on the brain centre itself. Balancing asanas, however, have a direct influence on the cerebellum, for a good sense of balance and coordination is required to practise them. Without a reasonable sense of balance it is difficult to do these asanas. Therefore, by practising and perfecting them the cerebellum is developed. And this improvement in the functioning of the cerebellum results in better coordination and health in the whole body. All the different functions of the body are

harmonized so that they work together instead of against each other.

These balancing asanas are also useful for inducing mental stability. To maintain equilibrium in the final pose, mental concentration is necessary. One's whole attention must be directed towards maintaining physical balance, which helps to remove stress and nervousness and to bring about a state of mental equanimity. When you have a well-integrated mind you will gain perfect control and coordination of the muscles and movements of the body.

Since sense of balance is rarely developed in everyday life you may find the following simple looking asana a little difficult. This means that your cerebellum is not functioning as well as it could. The body is very adaptable and through practice you will find that balancing asanas gradually become easier and easier. In this way you will improve the efficiency of the cerebellum.

GARUDASANA (EAGLE POSE)

Garuda is the bird that transports Lord Vishnu throughout the celestial realms. This asana is 'the eagle pose' because it resembles garuda or an eagle.

Technique

Take a standing position.

Raise the right leg and twist it around the left leg; if you have muscular legs you may find this a little difficult.

Ideally, the right thigh should lie in front of the left thigh and the right foot should rest on the calf of the left leg. But it is only people with slim, flexible legs who will be able to achieve this. Other people must do the best they can. Now fold the two arms at the elbows.

Twist the left arm around the right arm.

Try to place the palms together so that they resemble the beak of an eagle, or garuda.

This is the starting position.



Gaze at a fixed point in front of the body. Slowly bend the leg and lower the body as far as you are able, while maintaining balance. Only lower the body as far as is comfortable. Keep your eyes fixed on the point in front of the body throughout.

This is the final pose.

Maintain the final pose for a short time.

Then slowly return to the starting position.

Repeat the practice with the right arm wrapped around the left arm and the left leg wrapped around the right leg.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breathing should be normal throughout the entire practice.

One's attention should be fixed on a point in front of the body. The best place is a black spot on the wall in front of and at the same level as the eyes. Awareness of a fixed point is the secret of doing balancing asanas.

There is no limit to the time spent in the final pose.

Benefits

This asana helps to bring about mental and physical harmony for the reasons given in the introduction. It strengthens the muscles of the legs, tones the nerves and loosens the joints. It helps to alleviate sciatica and rheumatism in the legs and arms. It also helps to relieve hydrocele if it is done regularly and for a reasonable duration. It also develops poise and grace in the body.

Bandhas: Uddiyana Bandha

Uddiyana bandha is a very beneficial practice and an integral part of kriya yoga. Therefore, it must be perfected before undertaking the more advanced practice of kriya yoga.

Uddiyana bandha looks difficult, especially if you have never seen it demonstrated before. However, it is much simpler to do than it looks. But it must be done correctly.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *uddiyana* means 'to raise up' or 'to fly upwards'. The word *bandha* means to 'hold', 'tighten' or 'lock'. This practice is so called because the physical lock applied to the body causes the diaphragm to rise towards the chest. Another reason for the name is that the lock helps to direct prana into sushumna nadi so that it flows upwards to sahasrara. Sushumna nadi is the subtle pranic pathway within the spine which passes through the main psychic centres (chakras). The awakening of these centres implies a progressive expansion of awareness, until the cosmic awareness (sahasrara) is attained. This is why uddiyana bandha is useful for helping to expand awareness. For this purpose, it is systematically combined with specific pranayama practices.

Scriptural references

Uddiyana bandha is mentioned in a large number of scriptures. These include the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, the *Gheranda Samhita* and the *Baraha, Yoga Sikha, Yoga Kundalini, Dhyana Bindu, Yoga Tattva* and *Chudamani Upanishads*. We don't intend to give all of the quotations from these texts for they are very similar. We will merely give a few examples. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* gives the most detail: "That lock which causes the prana to fly up the sushumna is called uddiyana by all yogis." (3:55) "The practice to be described causes the bird (of prana) to fly upwards after taking a period of rest." (3:56) In other words, the latent prana is directed into the sushumna.

"Drawing the abdomen backwards and upwards in the navel region is called uddiyana. It is the lion which challenges the elephant of death." (3:57) That is, the practice helps to transcend normal states of awareness so that one gains insight into the nature of existence and mortality and the purpose of life.

"The practice of uddiyana bandha described by yogis is very easy to do. Regular practice makes even an old man youthful." (3:58) Uddiyana bandha revitalizes the whole body and can help to lead to states of meditation that can make even an old man feel young.

In the *Baraha Upanishad* it says: "The breath follows life in the same way that a shadow follows an object. Uddiyana is the practice that makes the ever restless breath fly upwards . . ." "To practise uddiyana seriously, the diet should be good and taken in small quantities." This last statement is particularly important if uddiyana is combined with regular and intense practices of pranayama.

We could give many more pages of quotations but we have given enough to show the importance and traditional method of doing uddiyana bandha.

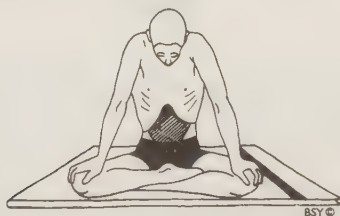
Position

The best position in which to do uddiyana bandha is any meditation asana such as padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana¹. The important thing is that the knees rest firmly on the ground so that the final lock can be maintained correctly. This is also the position necessary for practising kriya yoga. If you cannot sit in any of these positions then you can sit in vajrasana¹. But if this is the case, then we advise you to regularly practise leg loosening exercises so that you can eventually sit in any meditation asana². This is important for kriya yoga.

Uddiyana bandha can also be done in a standing position. This will be described at the end of this topic.

Preparatory practice

An excellent preparatory practice for developing uddiyana bandha is agnisar kriya³. If you can do agnisar kriya without the slightest difficulty then you should have no difficulty doing uddiyana bandha.



Technique

Sit in any meditation asana with the knees flat on the ground.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the knees; this is important to allow the arms to apply pressure in the final pose.

Close the eyes.

Relax the whole body.

Exhale as deeply as possible by accentuated contraction of the abdominal muscles and the chest; the lungs should be emptied as much as is possible.

Hold the breath outside.

Do jalandhara bandha⁴.

Then try to take a false inhalation. That is, expand the chest as though you are breathing in, but without actually allowing air to enter the lungs.

This false inhalation will automatically raise the diaphragm and enable the abdomen to become concave in shape, being raised inwards and upwards.

Note: there is no need to contract the abdominal muscles; in fact they should remain passive at this stage.

In this position the palms are pressed firmly against the knees and the arms straightened. This is the final position.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time while holding the breath out.

Then slowly relax the chest; that is, release the false inhalation; this will automatically allow the abdomen to reassume its normal shape.

Then release jalandhara bandha and bend the arms.

Inhale slowly.

This is 1 round.

Repeat the process when the breathing has

returned to normal. Don't strain under any circumstances.

Points to remember during the practice:

- Try initially to empty the lungs as much as possible by accentuated contraction of the abdominal muscles and the chest.
- Make sure you apply jalandhara bandha before doing the final position of uddiyana. It is jalandhara that prevents air entering the lungs during the false inhalation.
- It is the false inhalation that gives the final contraction of the abdomen. The abdominal muscles should remain passive. Many people contract the abdominal muscles in the final position – this is wrong.
- Don't allow air to enter the lungs when you make the false inhalation.
- When you release the final pose, firstly relax the chest then release jalandhara bandha and finally breathe in. This order is important to prevent injury to the lungs.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Take a deep exhalation before taking the final position. Hold the breath outside while taking the final position, while remaining in the final position and while returning to the starting position. Inhale on completion of the practice.

Beginners should be aware of doing the practice correctly and achieving perfect co-ordination between the various steps involved in taking the final position. When you have mastered the practice, be aware of the breathing process and mental counting in the final position. This applies especially if uddiyana is integrated with pranayama⁵.

You can practise as many rounds as you wish, but you must not strain. Beginners should do only a few rounds initially and then slowly increase the number when their system becomes accustomed to the practice.

The final position of each round should be held for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Sequence

The best time to do uddiyana bandha in your practice program is after asanas and pranayama, and before meditation practice. Uddiyana can also be combined with pranayama and mudras.

Time of practice

Early in the morning before breakfast is the best time.

Limitations

People who suffer from high blood pressure, heart problems, peptic or duodenal ulcers, colitis and other serious abdominal problems should not do this practice. Pregnant women should not do this practice, though they can perform it after childbirth to strengthen the abdominal muscles and reshape the abdominal area in general.

Precautions

The stomach must be empty before attempting this practice. Wait for four to five hours after eating your meal. If possible try to evacuate the bowels before doing the practice.

Benefits

The benefits are almost the same as for jalandhara bandha⁴. The entire abdomen is squeezed like a sponge. This pushes out all the stagnant blood. All the inner organs are revitalized. It can help to alleviate or prevent a large number of abdominal ailments including indigestion, constipation, diabetes, colitis and so forth if they are not too serious and chronic.

The adrenal glands are regularized thereby giving energy to a lethargic person and relaxation to an anxious or overwrought person. The solar plexus is also normalized. This centre is sometimes called the abdominal brain and it is the centre of energy in the whole body. This centre directs the correct flow of energy to all the different organs, whether abdominal, respiratory or whatever. Uddiyana bandha normalizes this centre and thereby helps to regulate the energy level in the whole body.

In the final position the air in the lungs is pressurized by the upward movement of the diaphragm and the false inhalation. This helps to open out the alveoli in the lungs and improves lung efficiency. At the same time the heart is given a good massage, which improves its functional efficiency.

Uddiyana bandha also has many subtle influences on the pranic body. The navel is the area of the manipura chakra, which is the centre of prana in the body. Physical stimulation of this area has repercussions on the more subtle

flows of prana and its distribution throughout the body. Uddiyana also redirects prana into the sushumna nadi. This helps to expand awareness and induces meditation.



Alternative technique

Uddiyana bandha can also be done in a standing position. This is generally easier for beginners. The technique is as follows:

Stand with your feet about half a metre apart. Bend forwards and bend the legs slightly at the knees. Place your palms on the knees. Exhale deeply; try to empty the lungs as much as possible.

Then bend your head downwards and press the chin against your chest in jalandhara bandha.

Make sure your arms are straight.

Then make a false inhalation (expand the chest as though breathing in, but not actually taking in air).

Straighten the legs slightly.

This movement will automatically draw the abdomen upwards and inwards to form uddiyana bandha.

Hold this position for a comfortable length of time. Then release the expansion of the chest and bend the legs, release jalandhara bandha and finally breathe in.

This method gives basically the same benefits as uddiyana bandha performed in a sitting position. However, the sitting form is preferable because it is more suitable for combination with meditative and pranayama practices.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2; Vajrasana – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁵ Topic 4 of this lesson

Pranayama: Practice

Now it is time to integrate uddiyana bandha with nadi shodhana pranayama¹. But we don't want you to strain. You should only combine them if you can do the previous pranayama practice easily and without effort². There should be no intense exertion. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "If inhalation, exhalation and breath retention are done slowly and rhythmically, then you will achieve success." (2:18) Take note of this advice and follow it.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 4 WITH UDDIYANA BANDHA

Uddiyana bandha, like all the bandhas, is associated with control of prana. It acts directly on the navel area (manipura chakra) which is the centre or storehouse of prana. It is therefore a very important technique. Stimulation of the navel area can lead to redistribution of prana throughout the entire body, and can lead directly to tranquillity and clarity of mind. It renders the mind in a fit state for meditative techniques and the spontaneous occurrence of meditation. Combined with pranayama, it becomes an especially powerful practice.

Current practice

In the previous two lessons on pranayama we suggested that you practise a ratio of 1:8:6:2: 1:8:6:2 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention respectively. These were combined with jalandhara bandha with both inner and outer breath retention. If you have mastered this stage then proceed to the next stage.

New practice

Using the same ratio practise uddiyana bandha during external breath retention only, combined with jalandhara bandha.

If you find this new practice too difficult then we suggest that you practise nadi shodhana

pranayama and uddiyana bandha separately. That is, practise uddiyana bandha as described in this lesson¹, and nadi shodhana pranayama as previously described². Or as an alternative you can reduce the duration of inhalation, exhalation and retention. We emphasize again: take care not to strain. If you feel any suffocation then stop the practice.

Notes

¹ Topic 3 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 3

Meditation: Nada Yoga (Part 2)

In the depths of our being there are innumerable sounds at different levels of vibration and subtlety. These sounds are always present but they are rarely perceived because the mind is continually extroverted, totally attracted and addicted to outside objects and events. The purpose of nada yoga is to perceive these inner sounds so that one is eventually able to hear the ultimate sound.

In this second topic on nada yoga¹ we want to explain the subject a little further and give an alternative technique.

Scriptural references

Chapter 4 of the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* discusses nada yoga in great detail. We don't intend to quote all the verses here for this would take too many pages, but it is worthwhile giving a selection. We suggest you read the full text for yourself.

"The great yogis of the past explained many ways of attaining samadhi through their own experience. (63) For those who are unable to understand the subtle essence of things, Gorakhnath taught the method of nada yoga. (65) The yogi should sit in muktasana (siddhasana) do shambhavi mudra and listen carefully to the inner sound in the right ear. (67) One should close the ears, eyes, the nostrils and the mouth. Then by listening to the nada one should explore the crystalline passage of the sushumna (the psychic realms). (68)

There are four stages of attainment in the practice: beginning, continuation, ripening and culmination. (69) In the beginning stage the brahmagranthi (psychic block associated with the mooladhara chakra) is pierced and bliss appears from the voidness. A sound like tinkling ornaments can be heard in the anahata chakra. (70) Then the vishnugranthi (psychic block associated with the anahata chakra) is pierced and bliss arises together with the sound of the bheri and vimarda (two kinds of musical instruments). (73) In the last stage

the prana enters the ajna chakra and pierces the rudra granthi (the third of the psychic knots) and the sound of a vina (lute) and a flute can be heard. (76) He who is wise closes his ears with his hands and listens carefully to the inner nada with one-pointed mind and achieves perfect stability. (82)

In the beginning of the practice of nada yoga one hears all types of sounds. In advanced stages these sounds become more and more subtle. (84) No matter what sound, the mind becomes dissolved in it if there is attraction. (89) The bee removes the honey from the flower without being distracted by the smell. In the same manner, the mind which is attracted to the nada is not distracted by other thoughts. (90) When the mind becomes fixed on the nada then it becomes unmoveable like a bird without wings. (92) Those people who want to experience samadhi should leave all other thoughts and carefully listen to the inner nada. (93) The awareness should be fixed on the sound until it becomes soundless. This is the state of superconsciousness." (101)

The different levels of nada

It is impossible to specify the nature of the nada as it extends into more subtle regions of being. They have to be personally experienced. However, as an indication of the direction that nada will lead to, the following fourfold classification has been given in the ancient texts:

1. *Vaikhari*: This is the grossest form of sound that we hear in the world around us. It is produced by striking two objects together and is the type discussed in physics. This is the plane of the spoken word. This is the starting point of nada yoga practice from which one must retread the path through the more subtle realms of nada.

2. *Madhyama*: This form of nada is more subtle than vaikhari. The word madhyama means 'in the middle', so called because it

is midway between the grossest nada and the more subtle nada. It is at this stage that nada begins to assume form and to crystallize from the formless subtle layers of nada. In nada yoga sadhana the aim is to hear sounds associated with this level.

3. *Pasyanti*: This nada can be seen but not heard. The sound has different specific colours which can be seen by inner vision. It exists in the deeper layers of the mind beyond the range of audible nada.

4. *Para*: This is transcendental sound. This is the point of origin of nada. It is the nada that is heard in states of super consciousness. It is way beyond normal levels of perception. It is nada that has such a high rate of vibration that it is beyond the classification of vibration. It is silent sound. It is associated with the state of samadhi. It is called the *anahata nada* – the unstruck sound and is beyond all conceptualization.

Many ancient texts also give a guidance to the actual sounds that can be heard during the practice of nada yoga. In the *Hamsa Upanishad* it gives the following list:

1. *Chini nada* – the sound is like the sound of the word ‘chini’.
2. *Chini-chini nada* – the sound is like the word ‘chini-chini’.
3. *Ghanta nada* – the sound of bells ringing.
4. *Shankha nada* – sound of a conch being blown.
5. *Tantri nada* – sound of a lute (tantri) or vina.
6. *Tala nada* – sound of cymbals.
7. *Bansuri nada* – sound of a flute.
8. *Bheri nada* – the echoing sound of a drum.
9. *Mridanga nada* – the sound of a double drum.
10. *Megha nada* – the roar of thunder, the ultimate sound.

Remember that the sounds are psychic, therefore, you should not take this list too seriously – it is merely an indication. You must perceive the sounds for yourself. The sound that you hear will depend on the depth to which your awareness has penetrated the ocean of your being.

NADA YOGA – PART 2

The method that we will shortly describe is similar to the method described in the

previous lesson¹. The main differences are that this practice is not preceded by a vocalized humming sound and that it is combined with retention of breath. Each of the practices has a specific use. The first method using bhramari pranayama is most suitable for beginners and for those who are overwhelmed by outer and mental disturbances. The loud humming sound helps to drown out these distractions and make the mind more concentrated so that one can eventually perceive the inner sounds. The method described here is more suitable for those who have a reasonably harmonized mind and who are not beset by distractions. It is the more advanced practice of the two.

Definition

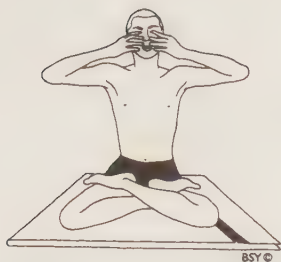
The method to be described has various names. It is called *shanmukhi mudra*, which literally means ‘the attitude of the seven gates’. It is so called because the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils and the mouth are closed during the practice. These are the seven doors of outer perception. It is through these doors that one receives data from the outside world. These doors are closed to allow the awareness to be directed into the mind. The practice is also called *baddha yoni asana* – ‘the locked source pose’. Here the word locked refers to the closing of the seven orifices of perception. Another name for the technique is *yonimudra*, which means ‘the invocation of the source’. That is, it is a method of merging with the source of nada.

Sitting position

One should sit in any comfortable meditative asana, preferably padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana². The hands should be raised in front of the face with the elbows pointing sideways. The ears should be closed with the thumbs, the eyes with the index fingers, the nostrils with the middle fingers and the mouth should be sealed by placing the ring and small fingers above and below the lips respectively. The fingers should gently but firmly close the seven doors.

Technique

Take the prescribed sitting pose.
Relax the whole body.
Hold the spine and head upright.
Throughout the practice, the middle fingers



should release the nostrils during inhalation and exhalation; without this it will be impossible to breathe.

Inhale deeply and slowly.

At the end of inhalation close the nostrils with the middle fingers.

Retain the breath (antar kumbhaka).

Try to hear sounds at the region of the back of the head (bindu), in the middle of the head or the right ear.

At first you will either hear many sounds or none, it does not matter, only listen.

Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable.

Then release the pressure of the middle fingers and slowly breathe out.

This is 1 round.

Breathe in again, close the nostrils, and retain the breath.

Listen to the inner sounds.

Then after some time release the nostrils and breathe out.

Continue in this way throughout the practice.

During the period of breath retention your whole awareness should be directed to the perception of inner nada.

At first there may be a confused jumble of sound, but gradually you will hear a sound; this may take a few days or a few weeks, but it will be perceived.

Many people hear the sound in the right ear, it does not matter.

When you hear a distinct sound be totally aware of it. It will become clearer and clearer. Keep your awareness fixed on the sound.

Listen very carefully.

If your sensitivity is sufficiently developed then you will hear another sound in the background; it may be faint, but perceivable. Leave the first sound and transfer your awareness to perception of the fainter sound. In this way you will transcend the first sound. Eventually this second sound will overwhelm your whole attention.

Again, with practice and enhanced sensitivity you will hear another sound begin to emerge. It will be faintly perceptible behind the louder second sound.

Direct your awareness to this new sound.

Carry on in this manner: perceive a sound and then discard it when you can perceive a more subtle sound.

The more subtle the sound that you can perceive, the deeper you will delve into the depths of your being.

Note: do not expect to hear subtle sounds on your first attempt. Practice is necessary. Eventually you will develop the knack of transcending first the gross external sounds and then the progressively more subtle sounds. Don't dwell on any of the sounds for too long. This is not the purpose of the practice. The aim is to leave each sound and to go deeper. Don't become lost or distracted by the beautiful sounds on your journey.

Breath retention

This technique gives greater benefits if you can retain your breath for extended periods of time. Those people who have been regularly practising nadi shodhana pranayama over a period of time will find this practice easy and very effective as a means to introspection. If you cannot hold your breath for a long time, we suggest that you practise the easier technique of nada yoga¹.

Point of awareness

Generally the awareness should be fixed at the back of the head (bindu). However, if you hear a distinct sound in any other area, such as the right ear or the middle of the head, then this is acceptable. Those who are devotionally inclined can try to listen to the nada in the heart region (anahata chakra).

The important thing is not so much the point of awareness, but that the awareness is fixed on progressively more subtle sounds.

Benefits

This is a powerful yet simple method of revealing the mysteries of your inner being. Total absorption on the nada can lead to dhyana. One soars into the heights of the inner space. Any of the basic benefits that we have enumerated for other meditative practices can be obtained from nada yoga sadhana.

Additional practices

Nada yoga can be combined with many other yogic techniques. For example, it can be integrated with vajroli mudra and moola bandha³. If you already know these practices then you can incorporate them at once, otherwise you can incorporate them with nada yoga when we describe them later.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ For details on moola bandha refer to Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4; for details on vajroli mudra refer to Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 1

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have described uddiyana bandha, garudasana and the second part of nada yoga practices, along with the fourth and final discussion on bhakti yoga. Those who are not bhakti inclined should try to practise karma yoga and some of the other techniques outlined in this book.

We suggest that you integrate nadi shodhana pranayama with uddiyana bandha as described in this lesson, if you are able, otherwise practise them separately.

In nada yoga, you can either continue to practise part 1, do part 2, or combine them both. Choose for yourself.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Japa	—	20
Nada Yoga	—	20
Chidakasha Dharana	—	16
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	15
Japa	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	9
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	7
Shavasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	4
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Garudasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	5
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour (for general health)

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Paschimottanasana	—	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Sarvangasana	—	3
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Uddiyana and Jalandhara Bandha	—	10
		30

Lesson 19

Only the practitioner of Kriya achieves siddhi (perfection) and none else. It cannot be achieved by mere reading of the scriptures. Neither by having dressed like a yogi can one get this. But siddhi is available only by the practice of Kriya. There is no doubt in it.

—*Hatha Yōga Pradīpikā* (1:64–66)

The Chakras (Part 1)

The chakras are pranic centres within the human framework. In each person, there are myriad of chakras. However, only a few principal ones are used in yogic practice. These few are the ones which span the full spectrum of man's being from the gross to the subtle. These main chakras are:

1. *Mooladhara*
2. *Swadhisthana*
3. *Manipura*
4. *Anahata*
5. *Vishuddhi*
6. *Ajna*
7. *Sahasrara*

Though we have included sahasrara in this list, it is not really a chakra; it transcends them all and includes all of the chakras and sahasrara together because they are the basic centres common to many mind awakening systems throughout the world, including yoga. Together with another focal point called the bindu they are the fundamental centres used in kriya yoga techniques. Some mind expanding systems bring in other chakras, such as the surya and chandra chakras above the navel. These are perfectly acceptable, but in yoga and tantra they are not used.

These chakras are both real and symbolic. That is, they imply two things. They represent:

1. Centres of subtle energies (prana) within the pranic body of man, each chakra being associated with pranic energy at specific frequency levels and subtlety. Each chakra is a switch which turns on or opens up specific levels of the mind.
2. Progressively higher states of awareness. That is, the chakras symbolize different levels of awareness in man from the more instinctive realms associated with mooladhara chakra to the more intuitive realms associated with ajna chakra. They symbolize the spiritual path.

These two aspects are really two different ways of saying the same thing, for manipulation

and control of prana in any of the centres will induce a corresponding state of awareness. Conversely, a specific state of awareness will induce prana to predominate at the corresponding chakra. Each is directly related to the other.

The internalized awareness aspect is symbolized by the ida nadi and the prana aspect by the pingala nadi. These two nadis will be fully discussed later in the book¹; it will suffice to say here that the ida and pingala are nadis that cross each other at each of the six main chakras. This implies that the awakening of each chakra is inseparably related to both prana and consciousness. There are many other implications which will not be discussed here.

Physical or mental stimulation of the psychic centres can lead to changes of consciousness. This awakens the psychic potential in man and gives him a greater vision and realization of his own reality. This is the purpose of kriya yoga. It is to give you a basic understanding of chakras and the physical location in the body in preparation for kriya yoga, that we have introduced the subject of chakras at this stage in the course.

Definition

The word *chakra* literally means 'wheel' or 'circle'. A better translation in the context of yoga is 'vortex' or 'whirlpool'. The chakras are vortices or whirlpools of pranic energy at specific areas in the body which control the circulation of prana permeating the entire human structure. They are beyond the realms of normal perception. Chakra is also widely known as *padma* – 'lotus'.

Meaning of the chakras

The chakras are an indication of the fullest potential of each and every person. They indicate that man can transcend his individual limitations. Science has generally accepted that man uses very little of his potential and

the chakras are clear indicators of this fact. The lowest of the human chakras, the mooladhara, represents the level of man where there are severe limitations both in knowledge and the ability to act. The higher chakras show how man can progressively transcend current limitations and go beyond himself, or rather, go beyond present conceptions of himself. The higher chakras represent higher levels in the range of understanding, harmony, bliss, identification and knowledge.

The chakras represent the powers of consciousness that lie within the range and reach of every human being. They show that the reality of the macrocosm exists within the microcosm of man according to the well-known maxim from *Vishwasara Tantra*: "That which is here is there; that which is not here does not exist."

The chakras depict the expansion of the 'I'. At first the word symbol 'I' is severely limited to body identification. This is the level of the mooladhara chakra. As one becomes more conscious, that is, as the higher chakras are awakened, so the understanding of 'I' expands. One's ego identification begins to encompass more and more. The ultimate expansion of 'I' occurs in the void of totality of sahasrara, which is beyond the chakras.

The chakras define the path that each person must tread to realize his or her fullest potential. They are, in a sense, a blueprint or guideline for the opening up of the mind at all stratas.

It is impossible to explain man's progressive flight into higher consciousness in terms of logic or the intellect. The process is allogical. That is, it is neither logical or illogical; it transcends both of these terms. Therefore, the ancient rishis, saints, yogis, sages, tantrics, seers, wise men, whatever name you wish to use to describe these illumined people, formulated the ascent into higher and higher states of consciousness in the form of symbolic diagrams of the chakras and sahasrara. Though still severely limited, these diagrams convey much more than words. And moreover, in this form they are less likely to cause confusion and useless intellectual speculations. Added to this, the symbols themselves can be used as points for focussing one's attention during yogic practices. That is, the symbols can be used to help awaken the actual chakras that they represent and

raise the level of consciousness. This is the case with kundalini and kriya yoga.

The path of yoga is a series of stages. The progressive awakening of the chakras corresponds to these stages. In the *Shiva Sutra* it says: "... the successive stages of yoga are full of wonders." The opening of the chakras is indeed full of wonders.

The chakras symbolized

The chakras have been known in all parts of the world and throughout history by illumined and psychic people. They are not confined to one system, for they constitute the fundamental makeup of man. Sensitive people in the so-called primitive tribes and societies knew the chakras from their own experiences. They tuned in with the chakras when they tuned in with the more subtle aspects of their pranic body. They did not need to formulate a system or symbolize them, for the system existed already within their own being.

As more complex societies began to develop, organized systems simultaneously arose to unfold the potential of the mind and raise levels of consciousness. The chakras were symbolized according to social codes of language, art and convention. The chakras were depicted in different ways, though always referring to the same aspect of man's being. Because of these differing symbols, many people regard the chakras as mere fanciful concepts and figments of the imagination. But this misses the whole point which is that the experience of the chakras cannot be represented in concrete words and diagrams. Words and symbols can only indicate the existence of the chakras. You must experience the chakras for yourself; you must awaken the potential of the mind for yourself. No one can ever experience them for you. They can tell you about them, but any description will be entirely inadequate.

So don't be discouraged by the different symbols of the chakras; they are only pointers. They are not the reality of the chakras. All symbolic systems of the chakras are only a means, a convenient and scientific means of guiding and assisting you towards your own experience.

We will now discuss the chakras according to different religions and mind exploring systems.

Jewish and Christian chakra symbolism

The chakras are widely mentioned in the *Bible*, especially in the Old Testament. However, the descriptions are highly coloured, being hidden in allegorical and acrostical terms. Many of the stories of the Old Testament are really allusions to the different chakra levels. Here we will confine ourselves to a few of the more obvious quotations.

In Genesis (28:12) it says: "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached the heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it." Here the ladder is the chakras, one above the other. The lower end rests on the earth, that is, mooladhara chakra, the lowest of the human chakras representing the plane of everyday material life. The top of the ladder reaches the heavens. This means that ascent through the chakras leads to liberation in sahasrara. The angels moving up and down the ladder refer to the paths of pravritti and nivritti widely mentioned in the Indian scriptures. The *pravritti* path is the outward path of creation, greater limitation and individuality, together with lowering of consciousness. The path of *nivritti* is the path back to the source, associated with the breaking down of individual barriers, limitations and the raising of levels of consciousness. This biblical verse uses few words but conveys a wealth of ideas and implications.

The story of Enoch is not included in the present day form of the *Bible*, which is a great pity for the story belongs in the *Bible* and is one of the clearest symbolic descriptions of the ascent through the chakras. One of the best manuscripts on this subject has recently been discovered in Russia. It is called *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch*. Little is known of its origin except that its present form was written around the beginning of the Christian era.

The story tells of a sage called Enoch (sometimes identified with the Egyptian mystic Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus) who raises his consciousness through the different chakras. He ascends through ten heavens, not seven. This is not really a contradiction to the Indian system for there are a number of other chakras widely mentioned in the tantric scriptures, but which are not commonly used in practices. For example, above the ajna chakra there are a number of additional chakras, such as the

soma chakra and the manas chakra. They are not used in the practical application of yogic techniques such as kriya yoga. Eventually Enoch ascends to 'the throne of the Lord', the sahasrara chakra, located at the tenth heaven.

It is a beautiful symbolic story, which also throws much light on the meaning of part of the present *Bible*. For example, it gives a much fuller explanation of Adam and Eve which makes the Genesis account more comprehensible.

In the New Testament (Revelation 1:20) there is a well-known verse: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are seven churches." The meaning is clear. The seven candlesticks and the seven churches are chakras. The seven stars are the presiding deities (angels) of each chakra, that is, the powers and aspects which are represented by each chakra.

In Judaism the symbol of the seven chakras is the menorah, which is indeed composed of seven candlesticks. In Christianity the chakras are represented by the Christmas tree, which also has great pagan significance for the same reason. It is believed that the tree was traditionally decorated with seven lights, each one higher than the other. It is only in recent times that the significance and symbolism of the Christmas tree has been forgotten.

It is said that the road (via Dolorosa) which Christ struggled along to reach the place of crucifixion (Golgotha) on the cross symbolizes the ascent through the chakras. It is not really a sad affair, for though Christ suffers, it is so that he purifies himself in order to awaken the chakras. The staggering walk of Christ is the successive progress through different stages of initiation. The crucifixion at Golgotha means the loss of his limited ego and his merging with sahasrara. He is then reborn (resurrected) into divine life.

There is a wealth of symbolic stories in the Bible. Both the Old and New Testaments are ingeniously disguised and symbolized expositions of the process of self-awakening. For example, the tabernacle is a symbol of enlightenment which requires seven months to make, that is, enlightenment comes after passing through the chakras. Stories of proph-

ets and apparently historical people personify processes concerned with spiritual awakening. They represent the changes that occur in the being of man or woman when he or she seeks release from the bondage of ignorance.

Islam and the chakras

In Islam there is a story that relates directly to the progressive awakening of the chakras. It tells of Mohammed's night journey to heaven in which he passes through the seven heavens into the presence of Allah. It is very similar to the story of Enoch. Mohammed was awakened one night by the angel Gabriel, who purified the prophet's being by removing and washing his heart. Then Mohammed was conveyed to Jerusalem by a strange creature called an *alborak*, a white animal the same size and shape as a mule, with the head of a woman and the tail of a peacock. At Jerusalem, Mohammed dismounted on Mount Moriah where he started to ascend a golden ladder lowered from heaven. Accompanied by Gabriel, he then proceeded to pass through the seven heavenly realms (chakras). The gate to each heaven was guarded by one of the patriarchs, to whom Mohammed paid due respect. These correspond to the presiding deity representing the nature of each chakra. At the gate of the first heaven (mooladhara) stood Adam, at the second gate (swadhisthana) stood John, at the third gate (manipura) Joseph, at the fourth gate (anahata) Enoch, at the fifth (vishuddhi) Aaron, at the sixth (ajna) Moses, and at the seventh Abraham (or according to other accounts Jesus). At this heaven Mohammed entered the throne of Allah, the sahasrara. Behind this story, there is much symbology associated with the different guardians of the chakras. But the story is an allegory for the awakening of the chakras.

The well-known Sufis were also fully acquainted with the chakras and used them in some of their practices.

Ancient Egyptian chakra symbolism

The ancient Egyptians were fully aware of the chakras. Most of their scriptures were destroyed; one of the few remaining manuscripts is called the *Divine Pymander of Hermes Trismegistus*. It contains the teachings of Hermes, the great mystic of Egypt. The sahasrara is referred to as the eighth sphere

– the source. From this, in descending order, come the seven rings upon which sit seven governors. These are the chakras with their corresponding residing deities. They represent progressively lower levels of consciousness from the eighth sphere downwards. Each of the rings is associated with a planet of the zodiac which has a specific attribute corresponding to that level of consciousness. The book makes it clear that the path to highest consciousness, called the 'white light', lies in climbing or ascending through these spheres.

The book tells the story of how Hermes meets the great dragon Poimandres, the lord of the word, who gives him spiritual instructions. Afterwards, Hermes is so inspired that he declares: "O people of the earth, men born and made of the elements, but with the essence of the divine within you, rise from your sleep, rise from your ignorance. Be thoughtful and understanding. Know that your home is not the earth but the light . . . prepare yourself to climb through the seven rings (chakras) and blend with the eternal light." It is an interesting manuscript, well worth reading.

Basilides, a great Egyptian Gnostic, is said to have coined the word *abraxas*. This seven lettered word signifies the creative power and the seven corresponding planetary angels. That is, the word represents the chakras and their presiding deities.

There is much more relevant symbolism in ancient Egyptian mysticism, even in the little that is known about it.

The chakras in European mystical societies

Many of the ancient mystical systems of Europe referred to man as the microcosmos – the miniature universe. Consciousness was called the macrocosmos – the greater universe. The microcosmos is a reflection of the macrocosmos. To show man's relationship with consciousness the macrocosmos is often shown as being contained within the microcosmos of man's body. That is, the wise mystics depicted the chakras within the human framework. The essence of all the practices of these mystical and pagan societies was to merge with the macrocosm and the microcosm. The keys were the chakras.

There is a beautiful symbol used by the ancient Kabbalists. It is the double triangle of

Solomon, where two triangles are interlaced to form a hexagon (this is, incidentally, one of the symbols of the anahata chakra). The upper facing triangle (apex upwards) represents the macrocosmos, the white Jehovah, or the lord of the light. The downward facing triangle (apex downwards) represents the microcosmos, the black Jehovah, the lord of reflections, or man. This symbolizes the interrelationship and identification of man with consciousness. It is said that seven creative powers or rays emanate from the upper white Jehovah (consciousness). These are the different levels of awareness associated with the chakras arising from the fountainhead, the sahasrara. These seven rays diverge from the source, giving rise to the universe of multitudinous names and forms. Then these divergent rays are converged and brought to focus in man. We leave you to work out the meaning and implications behind this symbolism.

The number seven was always regarded as a very important number in mystical societies. The Pythagoreans regarded it as the number of spiritual life because man is controlled by the seven celestial spirits. These are the chakras. The Pythagoreans represented the number seven by a geometrical cube, that is, the six surfaces and the mystical seventh point in the centre. The six faces are the chakras and central point is sahasrara, the core of them all. It is said that the number one lies in the centre of the cube and that it represents the real nature of man. This one is the realization of sahasrara, unity or the totality of all things. Reflect on this and try to understand what it means. If you get a logical answer then discard it, for the meaning is beyond the realm of logic.

Is it merely a coincidence that the *Bible* (Genesis) says that creation took place in seven days? Or that there are arbitrarily seven days in a week? Or that Shakespeare mentions the seven ages through which man must pass (*As You Like It* – act 2, scene 7)? These could have originally been direct or symbolic references to the chakras. Also seven is the number of man in numerology. There are many reasons for this, but one of them could be that the essence of man is represented by the six chakras and sahasrara.

In the middle ages, Johan Gitchel, a disciple of the great mystic Jacob Boehme, drew and

circulated various charts in his *Theosophical Practice* illustrating the different chakras. Hell is depicted as being in the region of the mooladhara chakra; that is the normal low awareness level. The charts depict that man has to gradually solve and overcome his problems in order to progressively open up the chakras.

Similar symbolism was used by Ptolemy in his so-called concept of the solar system. In modern times the ptolemaic scheme of the planetary system has been ridiculed by modern astronomers, for it shows the earth as the centre of the solar system around which all the other planets, including the sun, rotate. But this misses the whole point. Ptolemy was not referring to the material universe. He was interested in the levels of awareness of man and used his planetary scheme as a convenient symbol. His seven planets are the chakras and the centre of his universe, the earth, is the sahasrara. The ptolemaic scheme is really an indication or map of levels of awareness. One has to pass through the different spheres of chakras (planets) to reach the centre of one's being. The earth represents this centre. It is sahasrara. The ancients called it 'crystallinum primum', the crystal heaven.

All the systems depict divinity in human form. In the context of the chakras, it implies that man has the potential to transcend individual limitations. Each and every man and woman is a symbol of something much more. The physical framework is that which is visible, the chakras depict that which is invisible. They are the junction between 'that' and 'this', between the limited and the unlimited.

The chakras of acupuncture

Now we turn to China and Japan. The widely practised system of healing called acupuncture is actually based on the control and manipulation of the chakras. The chakras used, however, are not confined to the principal ones used in yogic practices, but include about seven hundred chakras located throughout the entire body. These chakra points are stimulated by needles on specific areas of the skin surface. This physical stimulation induces changes in the more subtle chakras, which in turn bring about positive changes in the state of health of specific internal organs to which they are

connected by subtle pathways. These pathways are called nadis in yoga, *keiraku* in Japanese terminology and *meridians* in the context of acupuncture.

Stimulation of these chakra points can also bring about psychological changes within an individual. Incorrect stimulation can also produce the opposite effect to that given by acupuncture, that is, ill health of the body and negative psychological states.

In Russia, they have photographed these chakra points using the special high frequency Kirlian photographic technique. Flows of prana (bioplasmic energy) have been clearly seen to flow along specific pathways throughout the entire body structure. These are the meridians of acupuncture. It has been found that these pathways become concentrated at specific points. These points were found to correspond exactly to the acupuncture points discovered by the ancient Chinese seers thousands of years ago through intuition and highly developed sensitivity. The Russians have designed an instrument called a tobiscope which locates all the acupuncture points.

The chakras are the subtle underlying centres. The physical points at which they can be stimulated are called *keiketsu* (or *seiketsu*). Besides acupuncture, these *keiketsu* or pressure points are used by various other Chinese and Japanese systems, including judo where they are called *kyushos*. For your interest, we have drawn up the following chart which compares the main yogic chakras with the corresponding chakras of acupuncture and judo.

Yoga (<i>Chakra</i>)	Acupuncture (<i>Keiketsu</i>)	Judo (<i>Kyusho</i>)
Vishuddhi	Diatsui	Hichu
Anahata	Danchu	Kyototsu
Manipura	Chukan	Suigetsu
Swadhisthana	Kangen	Myojo
Mooladhara	Chugyohn	Tsurigane

Incidentally, the term used for prana in acupuncture is *ki*. This is regarded as having its centre in the *chukan* (manipura), which is exactly the same as yoga. These correlations should not really surprise us, for the human body is basically the same no matter what colour, race or size. It is only the system that differs.

Tantric and yogic chakra symbolism

The use of chakras as a means to spiritual awakening is widely recognized by most religious and mind expansion sects of India. It is particularly popular in tantra, yoga and Buddhism.

Various different methods of symbolizing the chakras can be used. We don't intend to describe all these different systems for this will involve a lot of time; furthermore you are likely to become mentally constipated with facts and figures, which will tend to confuse rather than clarify. Instead we will adopt one system and describe each chakra in turn, together with an illustration, over the forthcoming lessons. This will allow us to give a full treatment of each chakra and for you to become fully conversant with its location, implications and, perhaps in the future, to realize the meaning of each chakra from your own experience.

In yoga and, in fact, in most Indian systems, the chakras are symbolized by lotus flowers. Other systems use different symbols; for example, the Rosicrucians symbolize the chakras by roses. The choice is arbitrary, but for the purposes of kriya yoga we will use lotus flowers. Each of the main chakras is represented by a lotus with a specific colour and number of petals as follows:

1. *Mooladhara* – four-petalled deep red lotus
2. *Swadhisthana* – six-petalled vermilion lotus
3. *Manipura* – ten-petalled bright yellow lotus
4. *Anahata* – twelve-petalled blue lotus
5. *Vishuddhi* – sixteen-petalled violet lotus
6. *Ajna* – two-petalled silver-blue lotus
7. *Sahasrara* – thousand-petalled lotus of all colours.

Again we emphasize that the *sahasrara* is not really a chakra, but that it transcends and contains them all within itself. The one thousand petals indicate that it contains infinite petals. It is limitless.

The use of the lotus as a symbol is very significant. Man must pass through three stages in spiritual life:

1. Ignorance
2. Aspiration and endeavour (*sadhana*)
3. Illumination.

The lotus also exists on three different levels: mud, water and air. It first of all starts to grow in the mud (ignorance), grows up through the water in an effort to reach the surface (endeavour and aspiration) and eventually

reaches the air and the direct light of the sun (illumination). Thus the lotus symbolizes man's growth from low states of awareness and lack of knowledge through the chakras to higher states of consciousness. The culmination of the growth of the lotus is a beautiful flower. In the same way, the culmination of man's spiritual quest is the awakening and blossoming of human potential. Incidentally, the lotus was also widely used in ancient Egyptian architecture, especially on pillars and columns. Possibly these represent the ascent through the chakras.

For source information on the chakras, we suggest you read *The Serpent Power* by John Woodroffe or the texts such as *Yoga Sikha*, *Yoga Kundalini*, *Amritanada*, *Hamsa*, *Brahma*, *Dhyānabindu*, *Sandilya*, *Yoga Tattva*, *Varaha Upanishads*, the *Devi Bhagavata* and *Linga Puranas*. But we warn you that it is often very difficult to understand the original scripture.

The important thing to remember is that the chakras are subtle in nature and that any picture of them is merely symbolic. Don't take any pictorial representation too seriously or literally. It is a means to an end, nothing more. The symbolic form and physical location of the chakras is an integral part of kriya yoga.

Attributes of the chakras

Although the meaning of each chakra can never be explained in words, especially the higher chakras, there are general attributes associated with each one. These don't represent the experience of the chakras, only the expression and feelings of a person at any particular chakra level.

Different texts list differing attributes to the chakras. Don't be confused by this, for as we have already explained, the meaning of the chakras is beyond words. Therefore, the characteristics belonging to the chakra levels are only subjective descriptions of what an individual considers to be the attributes. These are bound to be greatly coloured by one's individual nature, language and interpretation. These qualities are only guidelines. The following are very basic attributes that we associate with the main chakras.

1. *Mooladhara*. This is the centre where one is almost totally concerned with obtaining personal security. That is, one's main motive in life is directed towards obtaining food, a place to live and so forth. It is the centre where the

individual fights the world, which is regarded as being totally alien.

2. *Swadhisthana*. This centre is associated with the predominant motive of seeking personal pleasures and sensations through food, drink, sex, etc.

3. *Manipura*. This is the centre of self-assertion. One attempts to dominate situations and other people. One seeks to manipulate the world according to personal wishes. This is expressed in the predominant motive of gaining wealth, respect, etc.

4. *Anahata*. This is the centre where one begins to love and understand people for what they are, regardless of faults, idiosyncrasies, etc. One begins to accept other people.

5. *Vishuddhi*. This is the centre where one begins to understand and experience the world as a place of harmony and perfection. It is the centre where Shiva consumes the poison and the nectar, meaning that all experiences, good or bad are seen as part of an integrated whole, all of which help to remove one's personal problems and conditioning and thereby raise the level of consciousness. The world becomes a veritable Garden of Eden.

6. *Ajna*. This is the centre where one becomes an actor on the stage of the world, seeing everything as almost a dream. All actions, thoughts and objects, including one's own body and mind, are observed from the centre of one's being. This is the witnessing centre.

The chakras can also be divided into three approximate classes as follows:

1. *Mooladhara and swadhisthana*, the two lower chakras, are predominantly negative or tamasic in nature. That is, one's actions tend to be adharmic, disharmonious and not in accordance with one's individual nature.

2. *Manipura and anahata*, the two middle chakras, are a mixture of both negative and positive qualities. This is the level where rajas predominates; where actions and thoughts are a combination of dharma and adharma.

3. *Vishuddhi and ajna*, the two higher chakras, are predominantly positive (sattwic). One tends to follow dharma, where one's actions and thoughts are in accordance with one's individual nature.

This transformation from a predominance of *tamas* to *rajas*, then from *rajas* to *sattwa*, indicates progress in spiritual life. It indicates progressively more illumined states of mind.

The attributes that we have assigned to each chakra level are very, very rough. Do not take them too seriously, otherwise you may build up too many preconceptions without personal experience of the actual chakras. Remember also that the actual individual expression at a particular level will depend on personal dharma. For example, the anahata chakra is associated with love and devotion, but the actual expression and direction of these traits will depend on the nature of the individual. Some people will direct their devotion to a deity such as Rama or Christ. Others will direct it towards humanity as a whole, others to their guru, some to all things. The trait is the same, but the individual expression will be different. This applies to all the chakras.

Another point to remember is that all actions can be done at all levels. For example, one can enjoy food or be angry and unhappy on all chakra levels. It is the inner attitude and understanding that is different. Thus, anger at the mooladhara level will be expressed with total personal identification; it will easily bring mental imbalance. Anger at the ajna level will be done by the body and the mind. It will be witnessed; there will be no identification. This applies to all other actions, thoughts and emotions. They can occur at all levels. It is the identification and the inner attitude that characterizes each chakra and it is this that transforms one's entire life.

The chakra level of an individual can vary throughout the day. The purpose of yoga is to raise one's level of awareness so that one predominantly functions at higher chakra levels. The meaning and implications of the chakras is far beyond the characteristics that we have given, so don't accept them too seriously. Leave your mind open to the higher experiences that come from the awakening of the chakras. And you will perhaps have noticed that we have not even considered classifying anything above the ajna chakra. This realm, especially, is in the realm of no words – the realm of answers and no questions².

Notes

¹ For full details on ida and pingala nadis refer to The Balance of Life: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

² For the second part of this discussion refer to Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2



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Mooladhara

Mooladhara Chakra

This is the level of awareness that is symbolized by the Biblical story of Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. That is, their 'fall' occurred when they lost contact with the deeper core of their being, when they became selfish and totally lost in the world of objects. The Garden of Eden represents the world. It can either be experienced as a heaven or hell; it depends entirely on the level of harmony, understanding and awareness. Before Adam and Eve ate the first fruit of the tree of good and evil, they were in a heavenly state, in the higher chakras or sahasrara; after taking the forbidden fruit, they descended to the level of mundane experience and perception. The Garden of Eden did not change – the world remained the same – but their relationship, their understanding and their identification completely changed. And this story is trying to tell each and every person something very important: that the world can either be a place of bliss or a place of dissatisfaction depending entirely on your level of awareness. Either one lives at the insipid, semi-conscious and joyless level of the mooladhara chakra, or one ascends to the exalted, meaningful and blissful level of the higher chakras by harmonizing the mind. This is the way to transform a veritable hell on earth to a heaven on earth. The starting point to bring about this transformation through yogic practices is the mooladhara chakra.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *moola* means 'root' or 'base'; the word *adhara* means 'substratum' or 'support'. Therefore, the word mooladhara means 'the basic substratum'; this chakra is the fundamental root or framework of individual human existence. It is the platform from which each person can express himself or herself as an individualized centre of being. It is the springboard to more elevated levels of understanding. This centre is also widely

known as the *adhara chakra* – 'the support centre'.

The seat of the kundalini

The kundalini represents the latent potential in man and is generally regarded as residing in the mooladhara chakra. This implies that man has a unique faculty of self-awareness and understanding that normally remains untapped and unused. Man rarely uses even a fraction of his potential. This is the realized meaning behind the symbology of the kundalini residing at the mooladhara chakra.

There are also lower chakras, below mooladhara, called atala, vitala, sutala, talatala, rasatala, mahatala and patala. These relate to less developed forms of life in the animal and insect kingdoms, in plant life and in inanimate objects such as rocks and minerals. All lack self-awareness, or even the potential. But in man this potential exists . . . kundalini sleeps in mooladhara chakra. When it wakes up, then bliss and understanding increase as it ascends through the higher chakras.

Some mind awakening systems consider that the kundalini resides elsewhere. For example, Buddhists regard the kundalini as abiding in manipura chakra and that it should be awakened there. There is really no contradiction. It only means that Buddhists don't regard an individual as being on the spiritual path until he has reached the manipura chakra level. Below this level, at the mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras, man is considered to be predominantly instinctive, with little awareness and discrimination. And this is essentially true, in which case the kundalini, associated with awakening, can indeed be said to abide in the manipura chakra. It does at that particular level of understanding. The location of the kundalini depends only on definition. If you wish you can regard the spiritual path as beginning in animals and stones; in this case kundalini can be considered as abiding in the chakras below

mooladhara, in patala, for example. However, in yoga-tantra and most other systems, the kundalini is arbitrarily defined as abiding in mooladhara chakra, for it is at this level of being that life, in this case man, begins to become aware of itself and to unfold understanding even if it is very ego-centred and rudimentary. There are even many yoga-tantra texts that state that the kundalini really resides in sahasrara and this is true in a higher sense. So don't become confused by seemingly contradictory statements about the seat of kundalini. In the context of the practical application of yoga-tantra techniques, the seat of kundalini is mooladhara chakra. This is clearly stated as follows: "The power of consciousness resides in the form of the kundalini at the mooladhara chakra. It is in the shape of a serpent with three-and-a-half coils. While this serpent power lies dormant in the human body, then men and women lead an instinctive life." (*Gheranda Samhita* 3:44–45)

The coiled snake indicates that the power or potential of man is latent and unmanifested. Through yoga practices, the kundalini is transformed from a static to a dynamic form; it starts to express its innate power. It triggers the potential contained in sahasrara.

This has been a brief introduction to kundalini in relation to the mooladhara chakra. The subject of kundalini will be fully discussed in the next lesson¹.

Sushumna nadi

Sushumna is the symbolic passage through which kundalini rises through the chakras. It is generally regarded as starting at mooladhara chakra and ascending in turn through the other higher chakras to sahasrara. However, some scriptures give apparently contradictory information. For example, in the *Nigam Tatvasara*, a tantric text, it says categorically: "The bony rod (sushumna) goes from the feet to the brahma randhra (entrance to the sahasrara); it is known as the merudanda (literally spine, but meaning sushumna) of the fourteen spheres of being (the fourteen chakras from the patala to the ajna)."

This verse states that sushumna does not start at the mooladhara, but the lowest of the lower chakras, the patala. And this is acceptable for the same reason that the kundalini can abide in patala, mooladhara, manipura or in

any other chakra. It depends on definition. The sushumna starts wherever the kundalini is regarded as having its seat. In the Buddhist system, therefore, sushumna can be considered to begin at manipura chakra. In the case of a piece of rock, the sushumna, in a wide sense, can be regarded as beginning at the patala chakra. For the purposes of man in relation to yoga-tantra practices, however, sushumna is considered as starting at the mooladhara chakra¹.

Attributes

This is the centre where people are almost entirely self-centred, where the predominant drives, thoughts and actions are directed towards attaining some measure of security in the world. Even children are produced often with a strong motive of ensuring security by continuing one's family line in the future. People surround themselves with material objects, money, friends, etc. in order to feel secure. All things and all people are regarded as a means to obtaining the desperately sought after security.

There are many other aspects, but this is sufficient to indicate the general trends associated with mooladhara chakra.

Symbolism

There are many different ways of symbolizing the mooladhara chakra. The symbol in the diagram that we have adopted speaks for itself, though it is worthwhile explaining a few points.

In the middle of the diagram is a lingam called the *swayambhu lingam* (self-existent lingam). It is sometimes called the *dhumra lingam* (smoky coloured lingam). A serpent is wrapped three-and-a-half times around the lingam; this indicates the kundalini. The three coils have many meanings, the most obvious being the three aspects of nature: sattwa (harmony), rajas (action) and tamas (inertia and darkness). The half coil represents the potential of transcendence – the fourth state turiya. In many diagrams, the serpent is depicted with its head pointing downwards. This indicates that kundalini is asleep and that the individual is not treading the path of higher awareness. In our depiction, the kundalini is shown with its head pointing upwards, indicating that the kundalini has begun to wake up; the individual is beginning to awaken his potential.

It shows that the individual has the aspiration to awaken his potential. Until the serpent begins to look upwards, until one has aspiration, then one will never begin to unleash the great inner potential. And you, the reader, must be at this point for otherwise you would not have the interest in yoga. Therefore, we feel the upward facing serpent is more meaningful than the downward serpent for those who are following the path of yoga and who intend to practise kriya yoga in the future.

The mooladhara chakra is the centre of the earth element, therefore, the bija mantra *lam* is shown coloured yellow. Some symbolic forms of mooladhara depict a square, this being the symbol of the earth element. We leave you to interpret the rest of the symbol for yourself, for little is to be gained by oververbose explanations.

Location

The location of the mooladhara chakra is in the region of the perineum. It is slightly different in man and woman as follows:

For males: midway between the anus and the sexual organ, a centimetre or so above the skin surface.

For females: at the cervix, where the vagina and the uterus join.

The location is important for the purpose of yoga practices, including kriya yoga. Therefore, you should familiarize yourself with the area by practising the following technique.

MOOLADHARA CHAKRA LOCATION

The main purpose of this practice is to develop the ability to locate the trigger point of the mooladhara chakra, both physically and mentally.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable position.

Close the eyes. Hold the spine erect.

For a short time be aware of breathing.

Stage 1

Perform moola bandha².

Make sure that the contraction is concentrated at the mooladhara chakra trigger point (though there will be some degree of contraction at the anus). Continue this for as long as you have time available, at least for a few minutes.

Stage 2

Leave moola bandha.

Merely release and contract the trigger point rhythmically.

About one contraction per second is reasonable; or if you wish you can synchronize the contraction with the heartbeat.

Again, ensure that the contraction is focussed at the exact trigger point and not at the anus. Direct all your attention to the point of contraction. Do this for a few minutes.

Stage 3

Leave all physical contraction.

Try to feel the pulse beat at the trigger point; or try to mentally contract the point.

Direct your attention to the mooladhara chakra area.

The practice is the same as stage 2, but without physical contraction.

Continue for as long as you have time to spare.

Awareness

The awareness should be on the physical trigger point of the mooladhara chakra.

Duration

Try to spend about five minutes on each stage, giving a total of fifteen minutes for the entire practice.

Rationale

With practice you will be able to pinpoint the trigger point exactly. Mere thought of the point will immediately induce a clear location of it. This level of sensitivity is necessary before beginning kriya yoga.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

² Topic 4 of this lesson

Asanas: Practice

The first obstacle to be overcome in meditative practice is physical discomfort. That is, one must be able to relax and make the body perfectly comfortable and forget it. This is very difficult for many people, especially beginners, because general physical stiffness, aches and pains, are a continual reminder of the presence of the body. Under these conditions, it is impossible to introspect and direct perception into the mind. Until the body is made more flexible, it is very difficult to make headway in meditative practices, for one's attention is continually drawn outside.

There are two major aspects of body discomfort associated with meditative asanas:

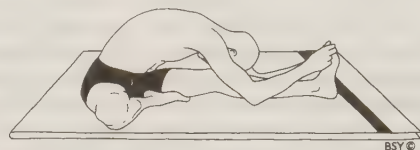
1. Stiffness of the legs: this prevents one sitting in a comfortable position for a prolonged period of time.
2. Stiffness and weakness of the back muscles: under this condition, one tends to slump forwards, giving rise to backache and interference with breathing.

The two forward bending asanas we will discuss in this topic, *janu sirshasana* (head to knee pose) and *ardha padma paschimottanasana* (half lotus back stretching pose), help directly to overcome these two hindrances. Firstly, they loosen up the leg joints and muscles, so that one eventually can sit in any one or more of the meditative asanas without the slightest physical discomfort. Secondly, they stretch, loosen and strengthen the back muscles, making it easier to hold the spine upright. These are two good reasons for practising both of these asanas.

JANU SIRSHASANA (HEAD TO KNEE POSE)

In Sanskrit, the word *janu* means 'knee' and *sirsha* means 'head'. Therefore, *janu sirshasana* can be translated as the 'head to knee pose'. Sometimes it is also called *ardha paschimottanasana* – the 'half lotus back stretching pose'

– because of its resemblance to *paschimottanasana*¹.



Technique Stage 1

Sit on the floor with both legs stretched out in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the sole of the foot against the inside surface of the right thigh.

Adjust the left foot so that the heel presses as near as possible to the region of the perineum (between the sexual organ and anus).

The bent left knee should be in contact with the ground.

Hold the spine straight.

Place both hands on the right thigh.

Relax the back muscles.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2

Throughout this stage and the following stages, the right leg should not be bent: that is, the right knee should not be raised.

Breathe in deeply.

Then breathe out while slowly leaning forwards and simultaneously sliding the hands along the top of the right leg stretching towards the right foot.

The aim is to bend forwards as far as comfortable; this will depend on the flexibility of your back.

You should adopt any one of the following positions depending on your capacity:

- If your back is very stiff, then you will only be able to touch the top of your calf. Grasp your leg at this point.
- If your back is more flexible, then you will be able to grasp your right ankle.

- If your back muscles are very supple, then you should be able to grasp the back of your right heel or toes. For the purposes of the asana, we prefer that you hold your toes as follows: grasp the big toe of the right foot with the index (second) and middle fingers, and the thumb of the left hand; the right hand should grasp the right foot just below the toes. If this is uncomfortable then you can grasp the back of the right heel with both hands.

Don't strain under any circumstances; only bend forwards as far as the flexibility of your back will comfortably allow.

At the end of the forward bend, try to touch the forehead on the right knee (only people who can do position 3 above will be able to do this). Then relax the whole body, especially the back. Breathe normally a few times and then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3

Keep the right leg straight throughout this stage.

Breathe in deeply.

Then while breathing out, gently but firmly pull your head further towards the right foot by using the arms. Those people who cannot touch the right knee with their head should look directly at the right foot; while those who can touch the forehead to the right knee should merely pull their head towards the foot keeping their forehead or chin in contact with the leg. Don't strain.

Try to let the back muscles relax totally, letting the pull come only from the arms.

The forward movement does not need to be great. At the end of the forward pull, remain in a stationary position and breathe in deeply. During the next exhalation try to pull the head a little further forwards and again maintain a static position while inhaling.

Repeat 3 or 4 times.

In all cases, the arms have to be bent; in the case of people who can touch their head on the right knee, the elbows should be bent downwards so that they touch the floor on both sides of the right leg.

The final position for those people with a flexible spine is as shown.

Other people, through daily practice, will be able to attain this final pose in the future when they loosen up their spine.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose. Stay in the final pose for a minute or so.

Then breathe in, while raising the head and trunk to the starting position.

Repeat the same stages 1, 2 and 3 with the right leg bent and the left leg straight.

Breathing

Inhale deeply in the starting position. Exhale as you bend forwards (stage 2). Breathe normally a number of times after the forward bend. Inhale deeply then exhale deeply as you pull yourself slightly forwards. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose. Inhale as you raise the body back to the starting position.

Mistakes to avoid

This asana gives many benefits if it is done correctly. Make sure you avoid the following common mistakes:

- Bending the knee of the straight leg upwards during the practice. If you do this then the asana becomes very easy; so easy that even a person with the stiffest back will be able to touch his head to his knee. But the benefits will be almost nil. Keep the leg straight so that the muscles at the rear of the legs (hamstring muscles) and the spinal muscles are stretched and become flexible through practice.
- Using the back muscles to bend the body forward. This defeats the purpose of the asana, for the contraction of the back muscles implies that the back is tensed, which prevents the fullest possible forward bend. Try to relax the spinal muscles throughout the entire practice. Let them be passively stretched. In this manner the spinal muscles will become progressively elongated and the vertebrae loosened.
- Excessive strain which can cause injury. Be careful not to apply force to the back when bending forwards. Apply a little tension by pulling on the arms, but not too much. You must use your discretion in this respect.

Other details

Janu sirshasana is similar to paschimottan-asana. As such, details on awareness, sequence, duration, limitations and benefits are all the same¹.

Leg loosening

The greatest advantage of janu sirshasana over paschimottanasana is that it simultaneously loosens the legs in preparation for meditative asanas. It gives basically the same benefits plus this extra one. This is the reason that we have introduced it at this stage. Earlier in the book we emphasized the importance of loosening up the legs for meditative asanas and kriya yoga². We described a number of specific leg loosening exercises to be practised every day. Because of lack of time you have probably not practised them. If this is the case then you should definitely include janu sirshasana (or ardha paschimottanasana) in your daily practice program. In this way you will loosen up the legs and the back, as well as obtain the benefits associated with forward bending asanas. If necessary you can replace paschimottanasana with either of the two asanas described in this topic.

Advanced practices from the final pose

In the description we gave of paschimottanasana we explained two advanced practices. These can also be integrated with janu sirshasana (and ardha padma paschimottanasana). These two refinements will intensify the benefits that can be obtained.

ARDHA PADMA PASCHIMOTTANASANA (HALF LOTUS BACK STRETCHING POSE)

In Sanskrit *ardha* means 'half', *padma* means 'lotus', *paschima* means 'back' and *uttan* means 'to stretch'. Therefore, *ardha padma paschimottanasana* can be translated as the 'half lotus back stretching pose'¹.

This asana is very similar to janu sirshasana. The main difference is that one leg is folded on top of the opposite thigh. It is therefore a little more difficult and applies a greater flexion on the bent leg. This asana should be practised by those people who find janu sirshasana reasonably easy and who want to further loosen up the legs beyond that obtainable from janu sirshasana. People with very stiff legs should not attempt this asana.

Technique

Stage 1 (advanced form)

Sit on the floor with both legs straight.

Fold the left leg and place the left foot on the



right thigh; this is called the half lotus position. Try to place the left foot as high as possible so that in the final pose it will firmly massage the abdominal organs. But don't strain.

If you are able, fold your left arm behind your back and try to grasp the toes of the left foot; to do this exhale deeply and bend slightly forwards.

Most people will find this difficult, in which case you should try the simplified form to be described shortly.

Sit upright. Breathe normally.

Relax the whole body, especially the back muscles.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2

This is the same as stage 2 for janu sirshasana except that the straight leg is grasped only by the right hand, the left hand remaining behind the back holding the toes of the left foot.

Also, unlike janu sirshasana, those who have supple spinal muscles should hold the big toe of the right foot with the index finger, middle finger and thumb of the right hand, instead of the left hand.

Stage 3

This stage is exactly the same as given for janu sirshasana. The final pose is shown above. One should return to the starting position while breathing in.

The procedure should then be repeated with the right leg folded on the left thigh.

Simplified form

Most people will find it difficult if not totally impossible to grasp the toes of the folded leg with the arm held behind the back. In this case, you should keep both arms in front of the body and grasp the straight leg with the two hands as described for janu sirshasana.

Other details

All other details – breathing, mistakes to avoid, leg loosening and advanced practices in the final pose – are as given for janu sirshasana.

Details on awareness, sequence, duration, limitations and benefits are as given for paschimottanasana¹.

Massage of the abdominal organs

Though the benefits obtainable from ardha padma paschimottanasana are almost identical to janu sirshasana and paschimottanasana, it has one distinctive characteristic: the foot of the folded leg applies an intense massage to the abdominal organs. Each leg is folded in turn; this massages each side of the abdomen, which helps to stimulate intestinal peristalsis and thereby alleviate constipation. In this context, one should remember that faecal matter in the bowels first of all moves up the ascending colon on the right side of the abdomen and then down the descending colon on the left side of the body before being pushed out of the anus. Therefore, it is important that the left leg is folded first (the left foot pressing and massaging the right side of the abdomen) so that the influence of the asana is in accordance with the movement of faeces within the colon.

All the other abdominal organs are also given an intense massage; the liver mostly when the left leg is folded and the spleen mostly when the right leg is folded; the kidneys each receive an equal massage alternatively; and the pancreas receives approximately an equal massage from each foot in turn. The other organs, such as the bladder, adrenal glands, etc. are also massaged.

To obtain the best possible massage of the internal organs, the foot of the folded leg should be firmly pressed into the abdomen. If you do the advanced technique where the toes of the folded leg are held by the arm behind the back, then this will happen automatically. If you do the simplified form of this asana, then you should take care that the foot presses as firmly as possible into the abdomen before bending forwards.

This intense massage of the spine will only be obtainable if you can bend forwards sufficiently to press the foot into the abdomen. Until this stage you must slowly loosen up the back and leg muscles and not worry too much about the benefits obtainable from the massage of the abdomen.

For fuller details of benefits refer to the topic on paschimottanasana¹.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

Bandhas: Moola Bandha

In this lesson we introduced the first of the human chakras, mooladhara¹. In kriya yoga, it is essential to be able to easily and exactly locate the physical trigger point of this chakra. A good method is to use the practice of moola bandha.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *moola* means 'root' and the word *bandha* means 'lock'. Here the word moola means various things, it refers to the mooladhara chakra, the seat of kundalini and it also refers to the root of the spine or the trunk of the body, the perineum. In English, moola bandha can be translated by the cumbersome name 'the perineum contraction lock'.

Scriptural references

This is an important yoga-tantra practice and is widely mentioned in the scriptures. One of the fullest descriptions is given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* Chapter 3: "Press the heels against the perineum and contract it firmly. Draw the apana upwards. This is known as moola bandha." (61) Here, the word apana refers to the function of the body, at all levels, gross and subtle, which expels energy and waste materials from the body. In the context of pranayama, apana refers to exhalation. "The downward action of apana should be directed upwards by contraction of the perineum." (62)

"Moola bandha brings about the union of prana and apana, and nada and bindu. This will bestow perfection in yoga. Of this there is no doubt." (64) Here, prana refers to the specific functions of the body which supply energy into the body to maintain the upkeep. This prana is contained in food, air that is breathed, as well as subtle prana in the environment. In the context of pranayama, prana refers to inhalation.

Balance of prana and apana implies that there is equilibrium between the incoming and outgoing energies of the body. In the case of

pranayama, balance of inhalation and exhalation signifies the retention of breath (kumbhaka).

Bindu and nada will be explained when we discuss the centre called bindu².

"The apana moves upwards and when it reaches the circle of fire (manipura chakra) the flame lengthens and reaches the anahata chakra." (65) "When the apana and the fire meet (at manipura) the prana is heated. This increases the digestive fire." (67) "Due to this kindling of the fire, apana and prana, the sleeping kundalini is awakened; it becomes straight like a snake beaten by a stick." (68) "The kundalini enters the brahma nadi in the same way that a snake enters a hole. The yogi should therefore practise moola bandha daily." (69)

The *brahma nadi* is the central core of sushumna³. Though the text that we have quoted may seem a bit vague, it nevertheless gives a clear indication of the role of moola bandha in kundalini yoga.

Moola bandha is also clearly described in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* and the *Gheranda Samhita*. The latter text sums up by saying: "Those who wish to swim across the ocean of samsara (world of delusion) should practise this bandha in a lonely place. Practice brings about control of the prana residing in the body. Do it in silence, with care and determination. All lethargy will vanish." (3:15)

Place of contraction

The area to be contracted is the physical trigger point of the mooladhara chakra. This has a slightly different location in men and women.

For males: in the perineum, between the anus and the sexual organ.

For females: at the cervix, where the vagina and the uterus meet. Moola bandha is often done incorrectly by contraction of the anus. Try to find the exact location that we have described and apply the contraction at that point during moola bandha.

Sitting position

The best asanas for moola bandha are siddhasana for men and siddha yoni asana for women⁴. While sitting in either of these asanas, one heel applies firm pressure in the region of the mooladhara chakra, which improves the physical contraction.

If you cannot sit in one of the above asanas then you can sit in any other meditative asana where the knees rest on the ground. These include padmasana, swastikasana, vajrasana or ardha padmasana⁴.

MOOLA BANDHA (PERINEUM CONTRACTION LOCK)

Sit in a comfortable position. Place the palms on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Inhale deeply.

Then hold the breath and practise jalandhara bandha⁵.

Contract the muscles at the mooladhara chakra region.

Draw the muscles upwards as much as you are able without excessive strain.

Keep your attention fixed on the point of contraction.

Hold this contraction for as long as possible.

Then release the contraction.

Release jalandhara bandha.

Raise the head and breathe out.

This is 1 round.

If necessary, allow the breathing to return to normal. Then do some more rounds.

Maintain awareness.

Don't strain.

Note: if you wish you can do the practice with the breath held externally (bahir kumbhaka); that is, one can breathe out initially and then do jalandhara bandha. However, this alternative method has the disadvantage that one is not able to retain the breath for such a long duration as internal retention.

Awareness and duration

While taking the final position and doing jalandhara bandha, awareness should be directed to the breath. In the final pose, the awareness should be fixed at the place of contraction in the perineum.

The final position can be held for as long as you can hold your breath. Practise as many

rounds as you wish, providing there is no strain or discomfort.

Limitations

As given for jalandhara bandha⁵.

Benefits

All the benefits of jalandhara bandha are obtained. The blood supply to the pelvic region is improved and the nerves stimulated. This helps to revitalize the organs in the region.

It helps to awaken mooladhara chakra and arouse the kundalini, by directing prana in the lower regions (called apana) upwards. It also helps to transmute sexual energy.

Preparatory practice

Those people who find moola bandha too difficult, perhaps through lack of control over the perineum muscles, should regularly practise ashwini mudra instead⁶, using either method 1 or 2. When you develop more control over the perineum muscles, then you should leave ashwini mudra and perform moola bandha instead.

Preparation for kriya yoga

If you are serious about learning and practising kriya yoga, then we strongly urge you to practise moola bandha regularly. It is absolutely necessary in order to develop sensitivity in the region of the perineum and to exactly locate the mooladhara chakra trigger point. Without this sensitivity, you will not be able to gain the most out of kriya yoga practices.

Notes

¹ Topic 2 of this lesson

² Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

⁴ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2; Vajrasana – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

⁵ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁶ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Pranayama: Practice

There is a direct link between tension, nervousness and neurosis and the breathing pattern. Modern science and psychology are especially clear on this fact. Anxiety tends to relate directly to breathing malfunctions; mental tension and shallow, rapid breathing go hand in hand. It has also been found that inhibition or suppression of emotions and feelings causes a corresponding inhibition of breathing. That which is non-emotionally expressed because of suppression is instead reflected physically in the form of inhibited respiration. The most common manifestation is irregular and shallow breathing, though often it results in more drastic illness such as asthma.

Pranayama, therefore, has a direct influence on reducing tension. This does not mean that deep and controlled breathing will instantaneously remove all your problems, but that it will help to induce relaxation; this will, in turn, help you to face and understand your deeper problems. It is worthwhile pointing out that mental tension tends to cause tightness in the muscles of the abdomen, chest and stomach. Pranayama practices accentuate the movements of these parts of the body and loosen them up. This, in turn, induces a degree of physical and mental relaxation.

The most direct influence of pranayama is feedback into the mind. Correction of bad and insufficient breathing will reflect backwards into the mind. If the emotional aspects of one's being manifest in the physical body, then there must also be an opposite effect. Correct breathing through pranayama, will help to release pent-up emotional blocks and tensions. A rhythmical breathing process leads to a harmonized peaceful mind.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 4 WITH UDDIYANA BANDHA

The technique of nadi shodhana combined with uddiyana bandha is quite advanced for most people, therefore, we suggest that you continue to practise it in the manner that we previously explained¹. Please be careful not to strain.

Moola Bandha contraction

Moola bandha can also be combined with uddiyana bandha and jalandhara bandha. This is called maha bandha, and in association with nadi shodhana pranayama, it is a very powerful technique. But this combination should not be attempted at this early stage, but later on when the body-mind is more prepared.

In this lesson we have described a technique for locating the mooladhara chakra, through the use of moola bandha². This technique in itself will require you to practise pranayama with breath retention. We suggest that you practise this technique after your daily practice of nadi shodhana pranayama.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 4

² Topic 4 of this lesson

Daily Practice Program

If you seriously intend to practise kriya yoga in the future then it is important that you develop sensitivity to the location of the trigger point of the mooladhara chakra. You should begin to practise the technique that we have described using moola bandha.

Nada yoga¹ is a wonderful practice. Try to find the time to do it regularly as part of your daily practices.

Continue to practise pranayama as described making sure that you practise within the limits of your body capacity.

Practice	Rounds	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours		
Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	4
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Janu Sirshasana or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Yoga Mudrasana	—	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Shavasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	—	15
Mooladhara Chakra location	—	15
Nada Yoga	—	25
Chidakasha Dharana	—	16
		120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	—	10
Shavasana	—	3
Shalabhasana	—	4
Shashankasana	—	4
Janu Sirshasana or		
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	4
Garudasana	1 each leg	4
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	—	10
Mooladhara Chakra location	—	15
Nada Yoga	—	15
Chidakasha Dharana	—	9
		90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	—	5
Shavasana	—	3
Shashankasana	—	3
Janu Sirshasana or		
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	—	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	—	3
Garudasana	1 each leg	3
Sarvangasana	—	4
Bhujangasana	—	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	—	10
Mooladhara Chakra location	—	10
Nada Yoga	—	12
		60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

The same as for Lesson 18, but include Janu Sirshasana
or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana

Notes

- ¹ Nada Yoga: Stage 1 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4;
Stage 2 – Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

Lesson 20

Most readers know that the meaning of the word yoga is union, but actually the path, the system of yoga, consists of a process of *viyoga* – separation. This seems to be a total contradiction, but is not. It means that through yoga practices, one must separate awareness from the mind and body. There must be a personal experience of the difference between the mind-body aspect and the awareness aspect of one's being. Only when this separation and difference is personally experienced can one know the truth behind it. And when this separation occurs between the seer and the seen, then one will understand oneself and life from a new and higher platform. There will be an explosion of new understanding. This *viyoga* is the first step towards the culmination of yoga; this separation is the first step towards unity.

Therefore, in your practices forget all concepts of union – all logical interpretations and understanding are wrong. Only worry about separation: separation of your awareness from mind-body identification. This is the aim of all paths of yoga: find the *viyoga* (separation) that will lead to yoga (union). Separate the *purusha* from *prakriti*, so that they can be united at a higher level.

The essence of yoga practices is really separation, not union. Separation is the method, union is the result. So be aware; be aware of everything that you do. Be a witness to all thoughts and actions. Separate your awareness from all other phenomena. This is not easy, but try.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Self-Acceptance

Accept your nature as it is now, whatever its obvious faults. Try not to continually feel that you are somehow inferior to others or that you are riddled with shortcomings and defects. It is only in this way that the grosser aspects and neuroses of the mind will drop away.

If elephants spent their time wishing they were goldfish, or peacocks spent their time wishing they were cows, then they would live totally useless and disharmonized lives. But animals live in accordance with the way that they have been designed. They have a unique role (dharma) to perform in the kaleidoscope of life and they do it. Because of this, they live harmoniously.

Man should also live a harmonized, tuned in life, but unfortunately this is rarely the case. Man can never accept himself and his faults, and in a way this is a good thing for it motivates him to overcome his apparent limitations and elevate himself to the higher realms of understanding and bliss. But generally the lack of self-acceptance is too overwhelming; it totally grinds a person into an overburdened state of worry and dissatisfaction, which leads to a life that is lived at a very low level compared to the possible potential. There should be more self-acceptance combined with the need to improve oneself. There should be aspiration for self-improvement, but not neurosis because of the faults that a man sees in himself. Try to accept your present personality, no matter what its obvious weaknesses and faults, but still have the aspiration to overcome them.

Non self-acceptance as a cause of disease

The inability to accept oneself is a fundamental cause of disease. Lack of self-acceptance results not only in mental disturbances, but also physical ailments. Mental dissatisfaction leads to a reflection and manifestation in the physical body.

Anger is widely regarded as a fault, but anger is actually a safety valve for all pent-up feelings.

But many moralistic systems and codes say: 'do not be angry' or 'anger is a sin'. Because of this, many people suppress their anger but the driving force behind the anger has to express itself somehow. It is rechannelled. If the suppression of anger is great enough and for prolonged periods of time it results in high blood pressure, or heart attack and so many other prevalent diseases. So we urge you to express your anger, if it is possible (sometimes circumstances make it difficult). Don't feel any pangs of guilt about your anger. Be angry, for it is better to express it openly than to transform it into disease at a later date. But when you feel angry be aware and in time the anger will disappear.

Consider another example. Every person has some desires. These are natural, they are part of man's innate nature. Without desire there would be no motivating force in life, children would not be produced and so forth. Yet many moralistic codes say that desire is bad. How can this be so? How can such natural feelings as desire be bad? Because of these unnatural codes, many people feel deep unhappiness and guilt about their desires. A person feels sexual desires, but because society says it is wrong and sinful, that person becomes very unhappy and suppresses his desires. This mental suppression eventually expresses itself in disruption of the physical body, especially in the form of malfunctioning of the sexual organs. So accept your desires; they are perfectly natural. Don't listen to narrow-minded moralistic codes. Whether you express your desires or not is, however, your business. When you have strong desires, let the thoughts come. Feel them. Be aware of them. In time they can be transcended.

The same applies with food. Many people feel that their eating habits are wrong. Well this is probably true, for gone are the days when primitive man only took food when he was hungry; now we have food, generally too

much and too rich, at fixed times during the day, whether there is hunger or not. But if you feel the need for a lot of food, it is better to indulge than to suppress. Suppression or guilt regarding one's eating habits will never solve anything. Many aspirants feel such guilt about their eating that they develop a neurosis and suppress their desire for food. The result is that the physical organs begin to malfunction in turn according to the abnormal needs of the mind. Of course, overindulgence in food can also lead to malfunctioning of the digestive organs, but it is likely to be much less destructive and serious. Accept your eating habits, but be aware. This is the way to whittle away unnatural food habits.

We could go on giving so many other examples, but by now you should clearly see the pattern: lack of self-acceptance leads to disease. Don't try to over discipline the mind, saying that it should be this or that it should act in accordance with a certain code, for this will only lead to suppression. Let the mind be free to do its own thing. But be aware. Don't suppress your thoughts for this will eventually lead to disease and unhappiness. Accept your thoughts, but with awareness. In time all disharmonious tendencies will slowly wither away through greater understanding.

Every person is fit to tread the yogic path

An important step in yoga is to accept your nature as much as you are able. If you can accept your nature, then we can also. Your purpose for wanting to do yoga is not important; your religion or non-religion is not important; and your lifestyle is also not important. The main thing is that you have started to practise yoga with a degree of sincerity. Your nature is unimportant; all faults are unimportant. Your present personality is the starting point. Yoga and daily life experiences will be the means to refine your being and eventually bring equilibrium. Everyone has the ability to contact elevated states of awareness. The potential lies within. It is not made or created, but at present this potential does not express itself because of imbalance and conditioning of the mind. These blocks are only superficial superimpositions on your nature. Each of us has the same potential. There is not one person in the world who is unfit to tread the path of yoga. If you make

the effort then you will start to tune in with yourself. But first of all accept your faults as being merely superficial aspects of your being.

Accept your nature, whether it is 'bad' or 'good'. Don't feel guilt. Accept your character for what it is: a product of circumstances. Acceptance will lead to acceptance of others. Don't suppress thoughts, whatever their nature. Accept that there are unruly traits and desires within you and eventually these disturbing traits will drop away. Let the hidden aspects of your subconscious mind rise to the surface. Don't fight them and don't be ashamed of them. Let them arise and face them. If you suppress them they will still influence your whole life, but from the murky depths of the subconscious mind. So you might as well let them bubble to the surface where you can become familiar with them. Eventually you will lose interest in them. They will fade away and no longer disturb your life, in the same way that water evaporates from a damp cloth placed in the hot sun. The evaporation occurs without the slightest effort.

The aim of man should be to find his natural role in life and stick to it. This is the basis of the spiritual path. Most people are on the path of adharma (in opposition to their natural inclinations). But you can never find and tread the path of dharma if you are in conflict with yourself. Non-acceptance only leads to neurosis and suppression. Accept your faults, but with awareness. This is the way to find your dharma. This is the way to harmonize your life and eventually transcend all faults and personality problems.

The Chakras (Part 2)

Don't make the mistake of thinking that the chakras are only awakened by a few specific forms of yoga. All paths of yoga are concerned with flowering the potential of the chakras; some more directly than others. The more direct approach is the method of kundalini, kriya and laya yoga. With karma, bhakti, jnana yoga, etc. the approach is indirect; no specific mention is made of the chakras in these systems. This does not mean that the chakras don't open, but that the chakras open as a consequence of higher levels of awareness. The chakras are opened so smoothly that they are not really felt as such. With the direct approach, the chakras are opened in order to induce a corresponding state of awareness. In the indirect approach, the chakras open as a consequence, a by-product of higher awareness. One method goes through the front door and the other goes through the back door in order to reach the same inner chamber of being.

Every religion, every mind awakening system, every spiritual system is concerned with unfolding the hidden potential of the chakras. They are all concerned with releasing the latent faculties and knowledge of the mind, and awakening of the mind implies the same thing as awakening of the chakras. The opening of the chakras means that layer upon layer of the mind is opened up . . . the closed book starts to reveal its inherent knowledge.

The granthis

The Sanskrit word *granthi* means 'knot'. In the context of the chakras, the word *granthi* is translated as 'psychic knot'. They are three in number, called the *brahma*, *vishnu* and *rudra* *granthis*. They represent levels of awareness (chakra domains) where the power of *maya* (illusion), ignorance and attachment to material things is especially strong.

They have many meanings. In the following we have given a very brief and simplified explanation of their implications.

1. *Brahma granthi*. This psychic knot functions in the region of the mooladhara chakra. It implies attachment to physical pleasures and material objects, and excessive selfishness. It also implies the ensnaring power of *tamas* – negativity, lethargy and ignorance.

2. *Vishnu granthi*. This psychic knot operates at the region of the anahata chakra. It is associated with attachment to things and people in an emotional sense. It is associated with attachment to inner psychic visions and so forth. It is connected with *rajas*, the tendency to passion and intense activities.

3. *Rudra granthi* functions in the region of the ajna chakra. It is associated with attachment to psychic powers such as telepathy, clairaudience and other mind phenomena. This psychic knot implies attachment to individuality. One must leave the sense of individual ego behind for further ascent, in the same way that a butterfly leaves the chrysalis behind in order to fly away to freedom. One must give up duality at the region of the *rudra granthi*.

All these psychic knots are obstacles or blocks on the route to *sahasrara*. They have to be progressively pierced or transcended in order for the kundalini power to rise through the chakras.

The kundalini defined

The progressive awakening of the chakras is called the raising of the *kundalini* (sometimes called the *kundali*) and is symbolized by a snake or serpent. The word *kundalini* is derived from the two Sanskrit words:

1. *Kundala*, which means 'coiled', indicating that the kundalini power is symbolized as a coiled snake residing in mooladhara chakra.
2. *Kunda*, which means 'a pit', 'depression' or 'deeper place', indicating that kundalini resides in a deeper place, the mooladhara chakra.

In English, the kundalini can be called 'the primal power' or 'the serpent power'.

In most people, kundalini sleeps or lies dormant in mooladhara chakra. At this level of awareness, the individual is awake to the world and asleep to himself. There is little realization of the potential of the mind. When the kundalini starts to awaken and rise up through the chakras, then man becomes more and more aware. Eventually, when the kundalini is fully aroused, then man is wide awake and in a state of superconsciousness. He is, in a sense, asleep to the world and in a state of yoga nidra.

Thus the kundalini symbolizes the awakening of the potential contained in the mind, the realization of the potential of each and every human being.

Sushumna defined

The sushumna is a symbolic passage (nadi) which connects all the main chakras. That is, sushumna is regarded as connecting all the different levels of consciousness. It is a symbolic passage through which the kundalini rises on its ascent from mooladhara to sahasrara.

The etymology of the word sushumna is not certain. A voluminous Sanskrit dictionary that we have in our library defines it as 'something very gracious and kind, and one of the seven principal rays of the sun, supposed to supply light and heat to the moon'. This is open to many interpretations, but it is significant that number seven once again occurs (the six chakras plus sahasrara). The sun may possibly represent the sahasrara which provides light (consciousness) to man (the moon). Also sushumna is indeed gracious for it facilitates the ascent of kundalini and the resulting bliss and knowledge.

In the *Shandiliya Upanishad* the sushumna is called the royal road (*rajapath*). The meaning of the word taro in the tarot (taro) cards is believed to be derived from the two Egyptian words: *tar* meaning 'road' and *ro* meaning 'royal'. Therefore, it seems that the meaning of the *tarot* is 'the royal path' and that the purpose of the cards is to tread the royal path. This path is the sushumna – the road to knowledge and bliss.

The sushumna is far more subtle than the physical body. However, for the purpose of yogic practices, it is regarded as being located in the centre of the spine, from top to bottom. The tantric scriptures make this very clear. In the *Sammohana Tantra* it says: "The sushumna

extends from mooladhara chakra to the abode of Brahman (sahasrara). It is located inside the spine and is the very means to all knowledge." (6:5-6)

The sushumna is the central pathway between the ida and pingala nadis¹. The ida and pingala have vast implications. They represent the internal and external aspects of existence. Sushumna implies the balance between them. That is, the kundalini arises when there is perfect harmony between the outside and inside worlds.

The sushumna is regarded as a hollow tube in which there are three more concentric tubes. Each is progressively more subtle than the previous tube (nadi) and contains the previous tubes within it. These represent the three aspects (gunas) of nature: tamas, rajas and sattwa; and consciousness.

The tubes or nadis are as follows:

1. *Sushumna* – signifying tamas
2. *Vajrini* – signifying rajas
3. *Chitrini* – signifying sattwa
4. *Brahma* – signifying consciousness

In short, tamas indicates ignorance, laziness and negativity; rajas indicates passion and activity; and sattwa represents purity, harmony and knowledge. The three aspects interplay throughout nature, in plant life, mineral life, animal life and the life of man. In an individual, any one of these aspects tends to predominate at a particular time. To raise levels of awareness tamas must be transmuted into raising of the kundalini through the central and most subtle passage, the brahma nadi.

The sushumna is regarded as being closed at its base near the mooladhara chakra. This is called the *Brahma dwara* – the gate of Brahman. This is the first gate that must be opened in order to ascend through the chakras. Yoga practices open this door and allow the kundalini to rise upwards through sushumna.

Kundalini in mythology

Mythology in all parts of the world is abundant with stories involving snakes. Many of these refer directly to the kundalini. Here we will merely give a few examples, for we don't want to become lost in an exposition on mythology.

The ancient Egyptians symbolized the kundalini as a snake rising up through the spine (sushumna). Egyptian mystics also wore a head-dress on which was fixed a snake (*uraeus*)

at the eyebrow centre. This centre is called the *bhṛumadhya* in yoga and is connected directly to the ajna chakra at the top of the spine. The uraeus therefore symbolizes the ascent of the kundalini. A similar head-dress is worn by various other groups of people throughout the world, including the American Indians.

Many of the prophets of the Old Testament in the *Bible*, such as Moses, are associated with a snake-shaped staff, representing the sushumna and kundalini.

Most people have heard of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and how Eve was tempted by a snake. The snake is kundalini – it represents consciousness. According to Genesis (3.1) the snake was more subtle than any beast in the field, that is, consciousness. Originally Adam and Eve lived in higher transcendental states, heaven on earth, the Garden of Eden. But through worldliness they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because of this, they descended to the level of the mooladhara chakra. It was worldliness that brought about their fall. Incidentally, the tree of life in the Garden of Eden symbolizes the sushumna.

The symbolism of the kundalini stretches back into the depths of time. It is believed by some people that the oldest book in the world is the *Bopal Vih*, written many thousands of years ago by the Mayans of Central America. In the book, there is an image of the deity Quetzalcoatl, in which a multi-rayed sun is portrayed on the crown of the head. Also included is the symbolic form of the snake. It seems almost certain that this represents the sahasrara (symbolized by one thousand petals in India) and the kundalini.

The snake was venerated by almost all the ancient mystical societies, including the Druids, Orphic mysteries and so forth. The ancients regarded the snake as the symbol of wisdom and salvation. Even Christ urged his disciples to be as wise as serpents. All these attributes are directly connected with the kundalini, not only because the snake lives for many years, but also because it symbolizes kundalini.

The snake has also been associated with energy and power. A snake itself does not suggest these qualities, but that which it symbolizes, the kundalini, does.

The snake has also been associated with evil. This seems contrary to its identification

with wisdom, but this is easily explainable. The descent of the kundalini to mooladhara implies lower levels of awareness, general disharmony and limitations, that is, evil. The reascent of the kundalini means knowledge. Thus the attributes assigned to the kundalini (snake) depend on the viewpoint, whether you are looking from mooladhara upwards or from ajna chakra downwards. It is the descent that is associated with evil.

There are also myths which tell of snakes descending to the earth during the creation of the world, which symbolizes the manifestation of all things of name and form, including man, through the descent of the kundalini down the different chakra levels. In man kundalini eventually resides in mooladhara chakra; in other beings and objects, the descent is to even lower levels.

The implications of kundalini

It is very easy to become caught up in superlatives and vague descriptions of kundalini. It is ineffable, so we will confine ourselves to a very simple and basic description.

In tantra and yoga, kundalini is regarded as feminine and is also called Shakti. She is the link to higher awareness and bliss. She is the revealer of all mantras and the means by which bliss trickles down from the eternal source, sahasrara, to individual beings.

The kundalini is the creator, sustainer and dissolver of all centres of being, including man. She creates by descending through the different chakra levels (*shruti krama*: process of creation); sustains by abiding in mooladhara chakra; and dissolves by ascending through the chakra levels (*laya krama*: process of absorption).

When kundalini descends to the lower chakras then she is the cause of delusion, limitation and lack of knowledge: maya. She is known as *jagan-mohini*, the world bewilderer; causing man to become caught up, ensnared and deluded by the outside world of name and form. As she descends, kundalini becomes progressively more gross and loses her power and subtlety.

In animals, insects, plants and all so-called inert objects, kundalini resides and sustains from levels below mooladhara chakra. In fact, the tantric scriptures list seven more chakra levels which exist below mooladhara: atala,

vitala, sutala, talatala, rasatala, mahatala and patala.

At these levels there is lack of any form of self-awareness that distinguishes man; this faculty does not arise until the level of the mooladhara chakra. We will not discuss these lower chakra levels for they are not important with regard to human aspiration and yogic practices.

In man kundalini normally resides and sustains from the level of the mooladhara chakra. The kundalini is said to dream at this level; it is the dream of everyday wakeful life. While she sleeps, man retains a strong sense of individuality and self-centredness; he is awake only to the world of name and form, and unaware of the untapped potential that is his heritage. At this level, man is really asleep; it is the tamasic state of being. The situation can be summarized as follows: when the kundalini sleeps in mooladhara, then man is awake to normal levels of being; this is really deep sleep. When kundalini wakes up, then man as an individual begins to arouse from his twenty-four hours a day waking slumber.

The reascent of kundalini through the chakras implies the reversal of creation. She becomes the cause of awakening, bliss and realization. Shakti returns to its source at sahasrara. As the kundalini progressively rises through the chakras, so the veils of maya are removed. It is this maya that clouds consciousness. Maya is thicker in the lower chakras and nil in sahasrara. As she awakens, the barriers of individuality begin to break down and evaporate like a mirage. One's self-identification gradually expands to include more and more.

Eventually kundalini merges with *maha kundalini* (great kundalini) – sahasrara. She merges with Shiva (consciousness) with whom she is identical. In her formless form she is consciousness; in her formed form she is Shakti, the power of manifestation.

The last few paragraphs can be summarized as: descent of the kundalini implies increasing separation, disidentification and lack of knowledge. Ascent implies increasing integration, identification, bliss and a more harmonized, wider view of one's being in relation to life and others. The kundalini, as a centre of consciousness and power, abides in mooladhara chakra in individual man. It abides in sahasrara when

individuality and mind are transcended. It occupies intermediate chakra levels according to the awareness and identification of the ego. It is the same kundalini power, but viewed from different levels of awareness, understanding and identification.

The kundalini both binds and liberates. It is both the cause of the fall and illumination. In the tantric scriptures, *Hevajra Tantra*, it says explicitly: "One must rise by that which one falls." That is, kundalini only shows herself to those people who seek her. To these she gives liberation; to others she is the cause of bondage.

In order to break down too much attachment to logical understanding of the kundalini, we will now tell you something that seems to contradict what we have already said, but which actually does not. The kundalini, in a higher sense, does not really abide in the mooladhara chakra or anywhere else. It ever abides in sahasrara. It does not really rise through the chakras. Each of the chakras is connected to sahasrara, and each in turn can turn on the power of kundalini in sahasrara. The chakras are really switches that make the kundalini seem to ascend; it actually remains in sahasrara, the reservoir. The kundalini that is said to abide in the mooladhara of each human being is really a reflection of that which always abides in sahasrara. Contemplate on this apparent paradox. Tread the path of jnana yoga. If you discover the answer, then you will find that there is no contradiction – kundalini is both in mooladhara and in sahasrara. But please don't take our word for it; find out for yourself.

The kundalini is often associated with sexual energy. In fact, in tantra, under specified conditions, sexual energy is used as a method of raising the kundalini and expanding levels of awareness. This can be done in two ways: either by actual sexual intercourse in a prescribed manner, or by abstaining from sexual relationships. In both cases, the sexual energy is transmuted. This process is called *urdhvaretas*, which means the power and energy behind sex is directed upwards to induce higher states of consciousness.

Many people tried to identify sexual energy directly with kundalini but this misses the real meaning, for it means much more than sexual energy. Sexual energy is merely a small part and aspect of the full power of kundalini.

The awakening of kundalini indicates greater and greater levels of mind. As she rises through the chakras, so one becomes more and more concentrated. The fluctuations of the mind begin to settle. The mind becomes more and more like a placid, calm sea, instead of a tumultuous, stormy ocean. One's awareness begins to flow as smoothly as the flow of oil from a vessel. One becomes aware of something that continually rivets the attention. The whole mind starts to flow in one direction and becomes a vehicle of bliss instead of unhappiness. Such is the boon of opening the chakras and awakening the kundalini.

The purpose of yoga is to retrace the path back to the source. In other words, the aim is to raise the kundalini (Shakti) so that she unites with her husband (Shiva) in sahasrara. Poetically, it is said that through the practice of yoga, kundalini develops an overwhelming desire to unite with her husband and for this reason awakens from her slumber in mooladhara. The awakening transforms everyday life into bliss. The world remains the same but one's changed attitude, feelings and awareness transform everything into a fulfilling, joyful experience.

Sound of the kundalini

Various ancient mystical societies conceived that the highest heaven (sahasrara) has the same musical tone as the earth (mooladhara chakra) and that it differs only in the musical pitch. Since there are seven basic notes in the musical scale, then these relate directly to the different chakra levels.

According to tantra, everything is a manifestation of *shabda*, subtle sound vibration. This is really another way of defining the kundalini. Sound in the form of mantras can also be used to raise the kundalini. It should therefore not be surprising to know that the cosmic sound Aum symbolizes and is kundalini. Aum arises in the realm of the sahasrara and then descends through the various chakra levels, until it manifests gross matter, organic life, including man. In the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* it says: "Aum resides in all created things (i.e. it is the kundalini). Generally, it remains downwards enjoying the material world." (v. 73) In man, Aum or kundalini resides in mooladhara.

The letters of Aum represent many things, but they notably indicate *tamas*, *rajas* and

sattwa. That is: A – *sattwa*, U – *rajas* and M – *tamas*. As we have already explained earlier, *tamas* predominates in the lower chakras, *rajas* in the middle chakras and *sattwa* in the higher chakras. Therefore, Aum symbolizes the progressive ascent of kundalini through the chakras. The symbol Aum as a whole symbolizes the sahasrara. But Aum is not only a symbol, it can also be used as a mantra to raise the kundalini when used under the right circumstances.

It is also significant that the well-known yogic scripture, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, praises nada yoga as being a powerful method of raising the kundalini. The following are selections: "Salutations to the sushumna, kundalini and the nectar secreted from the moon (bindu); O Manonmani (Brahman or the absolute), salutations to you, the source of supreme power and consciousness." (4:64) "Sri Gorakhnatha (a great yogi) described numerous types of *laya yoga* (methods of raising the kundalini). Amongst these *nadanusandhana* (discovering the source of nada) is the best." (4:66) "By this the brahma granthi is pierced and a wonderful bliss arises from the void. A tinkling sound can be heard emanating from the anahata chakra." (4:70)

"In the second stage prana enters the sushumna; the posture of the yogi becomes steady and he becomes wise like a divine being." (4:72) "Then the vishnu granthi is pierced and overwhelming bliss is experienced. In the shoonya (void) the sound of a bheri (type of musical instrument) is heard." (4:73) "In the final stage, when the prana enters the ajna chakra, the rudra granthi is pierced. The sound of a veena (musical instrument) takes place like the sound of a flute." (4:76) This describes the process of raising the kundalini. The practice of nada yoga is an excellent technique and if you are inclined, we suggest you practise it earnestly².

Incidentally, music is a powerful medium for producing changes in one's state of mind. Under the right conditions, it has a direct influence on the chakras. It depends on sensitivity. In fact, many great musicians attained elevated states of awareness through sound because of their heightened sensitivity. Music becomes a particularly powerful method of raising the kundalini when it is combined with *bhakti yoga*.

The chakras, physical organs and trigger points

In recent years, great efforts have been made to relate chakras directly to physical organs in the body. Also, people have tried to identify the kundalini with specific nerve pathways. We feel that this is not very valid. The chakras function on a pranic level. They definitely have an influence on the physical body, but the chakras should not be associated and identified with specific physical organs as such.

If you dissect the human body you will find no sign of the chakras. This does not mean that they don't exist, but that they are more subtle. It is only possible to see them through methods of modern science, such as Kirlian photography, or to experience them in states of supersensitivity.

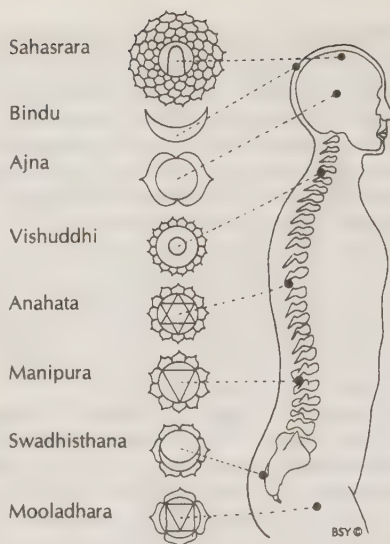
However, the focal point of the chakras can be assigned a definite location within the framework of the body. The chakras can be regarded as functioning at these definite points, though their influence and implications extend much deeper than the physical realms. Don't make the mistake of identifying the chakras with the physical organs in the body.

Think of the chakras as mountains in the sea. Only the peaks are visible and these are comparable to the physical aspects or influence of the chakras. Most of the island, and certainly the base, lies hidden below the waves. It is the same with the chakras: they mainly lie below the surface of normal perception. Their root lies behind the scenes, just as the base of the chakras comes from the mind. Yet at the same time, stimulation of the physical aspects of the chakras will give some feedback to the psychic realms. There will be stimulation of the deeper realms of the mind. This is the purpose of chakra stimulation. This stimulation can be physical, as in the case of acupuncture, or both physical and mental as in the case of yogic practices, such as kriya yoga.

You should regard the physical location of the chakras as trigger points for deeper realms of the mind. Try not to become involved in relating the chakras to specific physical organs of the body.

Chakra locations

The accompanying diagram indicates the physical locations of the trigger points of the chakras.



Don't take these positions too literally, but rather take them as physical switches for the more subtle chakras. You should note that most of the chakras lie within the spine; mooladhara is outside the bottom of the spine and ajna is at the top of the spine; bindu, which is not strictly a chakra, is at the back of the head. We have shown sahasrara in the centre of the crown of the head. This is entirely symbolic. You should carefully note the exact locations and relate them to your own body. This is essential for the forthcoming practice of kriya yoga. Part 3 of this discussion can be found in the next lesson³.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

² Nada yoga: Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4; Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 2



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Swadhisthana

Swadhisthana Chakra

The accompanying picture is a symbolic representation of the swadhisthana chakra, the second of the main chakras, coming immediately above mooladhara chakra¹, both in the physical location of the trigger point and the plane of awareness.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *swa* means 'one's own' and *adhithana* means 'dwelling place', 'residence'. Therefore, *swa+adhithana* = *swadhisthana*, which means 'one's own abode'. This chakra is regarded as being the substratum, the basis of individual human existence. This is explainable when one knows that this chakra is generally associated with the unconscious mind with its storehouse of mental impressions – samskaras. Individual being takes root in the unconscious mind. The many instinctive drives that are felt at the level of swadhisthana chakra bubble up from the depths of the unconscious mind. Swadhisthana is indeed the basis, the abode from which most people express themselves in the world. It is their basis for living life.

It is also said that swadhisthana chakra was once the seat of the kundalini, but that there was a fall, a further fall, and kundalini descended to the mooladhara chakra. Therefore, it is said that swadhisthana is the real root centre of man and not the mooladhara chakra. As such, it is called 'one's own abode'.

Chakra symbolism

Refer to the colour illustration. There are six petals on the lotus which is coloured vermilion. On many traditional pictures the Sanskrit letters *bam*, *bham*, *mam*, *yam*, *ram* and *lam* are written on the petals. The central portion of the picture contains a white crescent moon. The bija (seed) mantra is *vam*.

Attributes

The swadhisthana chakra represents the level of being where one is primarily concerned

with seeking pleasurable sensations. One is motivated to obtain pleasure through the sense organs in the form of food, sex, wine, etc. It is very similar to the mooladhara chakra, except here there is more appreciation of the enjoyment of the pleasures in themselves. At the mooladhara chakra, pleasurable sensations are sought in order to satisfy the need for security. Swadhisthana is the level where people motivate their whole life to attaining pleasure in the way that suits them. The world, all things and other people are viewed according to the amount of pleasure that they can bring.

As we have already pointed out, swadhisthana is the level where samskaras (subconscious and unconscious mental impressions) begin to show themselves. They become manifest very clearly in overwhelming cravings for food, sex, etc. This is the level of man that Freud was very much concerned with. He did not realize that man's nature extends well beyond this level.

In *The Serpent Power* by John Woodroffe, the attributes of swadhisthana are given as credulity, suspicion, disdain, false knowledge and pitilessness. These are from original tantric texts.

This is as much as we want to say about the characteristics of the swadhisthana chakra, for mere knowledge of these attributes is not very useful. Furthermore, they are arbitrary in that they are subjective. They are only manifestations of that level of awareness and don't in any way indicate the experience of that awareness level.

It is said that most people in the world today predominantly function at this chakra level.

Chakra kshetram

In kriya yoga practices the trigger points of all the main chakras are used. These trigger points ascend from mooladhara to ajna chakra, following the contours of the spine between

the swadhisthana and ajna chakras. The swadhisthana, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi chakras are also regarded as having physical counterparts on the front surface of the body. They lie directly in front of the corresponding chakras and on the same horizontal plane. Each of these frontal trigger points is called *chakra kshetram*. They can be regarded as reflections of the original chakra trigger points. The reflection of the swadhisthana chakra is called the *swadhisthana kshetram*. The same applies to the other three chakras – manipura, anahata and vishuddhi.

These frontal centres or kshetrams are essential in kriya yoga techniques. It is necessary to be able to locate them. Therefore, in this topic and in the next three lessons we will outline practices that increase sensitivity to both the chakra trigger points and the corresponding kshetrams².

Location

The physical trigger point of the swadhisthana chakra is at the base of the spine, at the coccyx (the tailbone). If you place your hand on the bottom of the spine, you will feel a small bulb at the lowest point just above the anus. This is the coccyx bone and the region of the physical trigger point of the swadhisthana chakra.

The physical location of the swadhisthana kshetram is at the level of the pubic bone in front of the body. It is just above the sexual organ directly in front of the coccyx bone.

It can be regarded as being on the skin surface.

Differentiation between mooladhara and swadhisthana

It is important to be able to discern the difference between the physical location of the mooladhara chakra and both the swadhisthana chakra and kshetram. You should know the difference in position both 'anatomically and you should also be able to feel the difference with the eyes closed. As such, we suggest that you first of all spend some time locating the mooladhara chakra¹, then attempt the simple practice that we will shortly describe to locate the swadhisthana chakra and kshetram. This will enable you to more clearly discern and distinguish the different locations.

Remember, the mooladhara chakra is located in the perineum between the legs. It is

roughly midway between the swadhisthana chakra and the swadhisthana kshetram, but a little lower. At first it may be difficult to feel and differentiate between these positions, but with practice it will gradually become easy.

SWADHISTHANA CHAKRA LOCATION

Technique

Take a comfortable sitting pose.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Stage 1: location of mooladhara chakra

Direct all your attention to the mooladhara chakra region¹.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Stage 2: location of swadhisthana chakra

Try to feel the position of the swadhisthana chakra at the coccyx.

The best way is to practise ashwini mudra with rapid contractions³.

Try to feel pressure waves spreading out from the place of physical contraction.

Imagine that the base of the spine (coccyx) is the wooden support of a pier above the sea; the waves of contraction are the strong sea waves striking it.

Focus your whole attention on the base of the spine and feel the pressure waves.

Continue this for a few minutes.

Then do the next stage.

Stage 3: swadhisthana kshetram location

Focus your attention on the front surface of the body directly in front of the coccyx.

Practise ashwini mudra.

Feel the pressure waves emanating outwards and striking the pubic bone.

Fix your whole attention on the centre of the swadhisthana kshetram.

Do this for a few minutes.

Stage 4: mental location

For a few minutes be aware mentally of the blood pulse at the mooladhara chakra.

Then try to feel the blood pulse at the swadhisthana chakra.

Practise this for a few minutes.

Then feel the pulse beat at the swadhisthana kshetram.

Continue in this way for a few minutes.

The important thing is that with practice you should clearly feel the difference between these three trigger points.

This is the end of the practice.

You can extend the practice by doing any of the stages that you find most difficult.

Duration of practice

Try to practise for at least fifteen minutes every day until it is mastered. In this way you will be fully prepared for the next stage².

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

² Manipura chakra – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3;
Anahata chakra – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2;
Vishuddhi chakra – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Asanas: Practice

Matsyasana and supta vajrasana are two excellent backward bending asanas. They are perfectly suited as counterposes for forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana¹, ardha padma paschimottanasana, janu sirshasana², etc., as well as inverted asanas such as sarvangasana³. They also give characteristic benefits in their own right.

We are introducing them together because they give similar benefits. Generally, there is no need to practise both in an asana program. Choose the one that you like best.

MATSYASANA (FISH POSE)

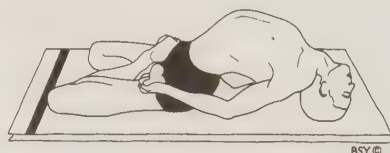
In Sanskrit the word *matsya* means 'fish'. Therefore, this asana can be translated as 'the fish pose'. At first this may seem a strange name for an asana that seems to bear no resemblance whatsoever to any kind of fish. However, if you use a little imagination you can see that the folded legs in padmasana resemble the tail of a fish; the rest of the body represents the body of the fish, and the head corresponds to the head of the fish. This is not difficult to imagine. But there is a better reason why this asana is called the fish pose: it is an excellent position for floating in water for prolonged periods of time.

The folded legs change the position of the centre of gravity (the centre of weight in the body); it moves nearer the head. This means that the head can be held higher above the water, allowing ease in respiration. Furthermore, since the legs are locked in a firm position, the body becomes more compact and rigid and therefore able to float in water with much less effort.

Technique – classical pose

In order to do the classical pose one must be able to sit in padmasana⁴. If you cannot sit in padmasana, then you can do either of the variations that we will shortly describe. The

aim of course should be to eventually master the classical pose, but until this stage you can at least reap the benefits by practising the simpler variation.



Stage 1: starting position

Sit in padmasana⁴.

If you cannot sit in padmasana please don't try to force your legs.

Relax the whole body.

Stage 2: leaning backwards

Lean slightly backwards.

Place the hands on the floor slightly behind and to the side of the buttocks.

Support the weight of the body on the straight arms.

Bend one of the arms, allowing the forearm and elbow to rest on the ground; to do this you will have to twist your body to one side.

Then slowly bend the other arm so that both elbows rest on the ground.

At this stage the trunk and head should be supported above the ground behind the buttocks.

Then take the final pose.

Stage 3: final position – alternative A

Bend your head backwards so that you can see the floor behind your head.

Stretch the front of the neck as much as is comfortable.

Slowly slide your arms forwards away from your head and lower the top of the head towards the ground.

Gently allow the top of the head to support the body weight.

Adjust the position of the head so that the maximum arch of the back is attained. Then relax the arms, allowing the head (and the buttocks and legs) to support the weight of the body.

If possible try to grasp the big toes with the hands; if this is too difficult place the hands on the thighs or on the floor.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Close your eyes. Be aware of breathing.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable. Then return to the starting position by executing stages 2 and 3 in reverse; that is, using the arms to raise the body back to the upright position.

Stage 3: final position – alternative B

This stage can be done after stage 2 as an alternative.

Slowly slide the arms forwards from the end of stage 2 allowing the back of the head and the spine to rest on the floor.

Your face should be directed towards the ceiling.

Place the hands under the head with the palms open and facing upwards, the fingers interlocked.

The back of the head should rest in the open palms.

Without straining try to push your bent elbows towards the ground; with practice you should be able to rest the elbows on the ground.

Relax the whole body.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Then release the position of the arms and hands.

Return to the starting position using the arms in turn to raise the body in the reverse order to that described in stage 2.

Note: it is important that the body is lowered into the final pose and also raised from the final pose to the starting position by using the arms as described in stage 2. Don't throw your body backwards for it is very easy to injure the spine. The movement should be done with control and care.

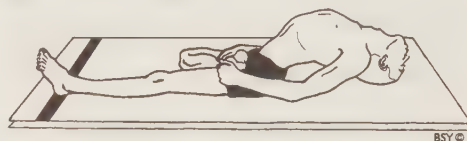
Final position

You can choose any of the alternative final poses or if you wish you can do both. Each has a distinctive influence on the body. Alternative

A gives the best flexion of the spine and neck. Alternative B has a notable influence on the abdomen and chest, giving them a powerful stretch that massages the internal organs and nerves.

Variations for beginners

The following two variations are simplified forms for beginners. They can be done by those people who cannot sit in padmasana. They give nearly equivalent benefits as the classical form, though at a lower level.



Variation 1: in ardha padmasana

Sit on the floor with the two legs in front of the body.

Fold one of the legs into ardha padmasana (half lotus pose) keeping the other leg straight⁴. Do stage 2 described for the classical form of matsyasana.

Then do alternative A (don't do alternative B for there will be little or no benefits).

In the final pose hold the toes and ankle of the folded leg with both hands.

Make sure that the back is arched as much as the flexibility of your back will allow.

This is the final pose.

Relax the body.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of breathing.

Stay in the final pose for some time.

Then return to the starting position.

Repeat the same practice with the other leg folded.



Variation 2: with both legs straight

Sit on the floor with both legs straight in front of the body.

Do stage 2 as described for the classical asana. Bend your head backwards and look at the floor behind the head.

Gently lower the head to the ground by sliding the arms away from the head towards the feet. Accentuate the upwards arch of the spine and then let the head support the weight of the body. Then place the arms either on the thighs or let them rest on the floor.

Close the eyes.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply with awareness.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable duration and then return to the starting position.

Note: the final stage is the equivalent of alternative A; don't do alternative B for this will mean that you will merely lie flat on your back. This of course can give benefits, but has no connection with matsyasana.

Breathing, awareness and duration

In stages 1 and 2 the breathing is not important. In the final stage the breathing should be deep and slow.

While moving into the final pose be attentive to the slow physical movements. In the final pose be aware of deep and slow breathing.

The asana can be done for up to five minutes. A reasonable duration to reap benefits is three minutes.

Counterpose

Matsyasana is an excellent counterpose for all forward bending asanas and for sarvangasana. Therefore, it can be done after any of these types of asanas. It is the ideal counterpose for sarvangasana since it stretches the neck in the opposite direction, releasing any muscular tension³.

Limitations

People who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia or any serious spinal ailment should not do matsyasana without expert guidance. Ladies in an advanced state of pregnancy should also not attempt to do this asana.

Benefits

Matsyasana gives an excellent massage of the abdominal organs, thereby helping to alleviate various types of digestive disorders.

The ribcage and lungs are given an accentuated stretch which helps to improve the breathing process by allowing the chest to expand to full capacity during respiration. It is therefore a good asana for those people who

suffer from asthma, bronchitis or any other lung ailments.

Matsyasana loosens up the whole spine and removes any tendency towards round shoulders. The associated nerve connections and blood supply are rendered more efficient. The nerves in the neck, and the thyroid gland are particularly influenced.

The pelvic region is also given a good stretch; this asana is therefore useful for ladies in preventing or removing various forms of sexual malfunctions. The pressure of the legs on the thighs greatly reduces the blood circulation in the legs; the femoral arteries are compressed. The blood flow is diverted to the pelvic organs including the sexual glands (testes and prostate in males and ovaries in females), which helps to revitalize these organs and eliminate various types of associated ailments. Youthfulness and vitality are also closely related to the testes and ovaries – matsyasana therefore helps to bring about these desirable attributes.

It is also a useful asana for loosening up the legs in preparation for sitting in still postures for meditation practice.

SUPTA VAJRASANA (SLEEPING THUNDERBOLT POSE)

The Sanskrit word *supta* means 'sleeping' and *vajra* is the name of a pranic channel (nadi) connected with sexual energy. Vajra also means 'thunderbolt' the so-called weapon of Indra, the king of the gods in Hindu mythology. In this context, it is also associated with sexual energy. This asana is so called because it helps to transmute sexual energy into more subtle forms of energy.

There is no equivalent English word for vajra, therefore any translation is bound to be inaccurate. Supta vajrasana is called various names, the most common of which are 'the sleeping pelvic pose', 'the supine pelvic pose' and 'the sleeping thunderbolt pose'. The Sanskrit name most aptly describes the asana.

This asana gives the same benefits as matsyasana, therefore it can replace matsyasana in your program.

Technique – classical form

To do the classical form of the asana you should have a reasonably supple back and

flexible legs. If you find this classical form too difficult you can practise the simplified form instead.

Stage 1: starting position

Sit in vajrasana⁵.

The knees can be together or separated.

Stage 2: leaning backwards

Do stage 2 as described for the classical pose of matsyasana.



Stage 3: final pose – alternative A

Do stage 3: final position – alternative A as described for the technique of matsyasana.

The final pose is illustrated above.



Stage 3: final pose – alternative B

This is quite difficult if your legs are stiff. Be sure not to strain. If this alternative is too difficult, do the simpler alternative A instead. The movement is performed in the same way as described for matsyasana stage 3: final position – alternative B.

The arms can be folded behind the head in the final pose as shown.

Precaution

Special care should be taken not to strain the muscles and ligaments of the thighs and knees. In this context it is important not to unfold the legs from the final pose. You should raise the body to the starting position and then straighten your legs. If you try to straighten your legs from the final position you will easily injure them. Many people have found this out from bitter experience.

Further details

All other details: breathing, awareness, duration, counterpose, limitations and benefits are as given for matsyasana.

Simplified variation for beginners

Those people who have stiff legs should not attempt the classical form of *supta vajrasana*. Instead, they should do the simplified form where the legs are kept straight in front of the body. That is, the legs are not folded under the buttocks in *vajrasana*. This variation is exactly the same as 'Method 2: with both legs straight' described under the heading 'Techniques for Beginners' in our description of *matsyasana*.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

⁴ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 1)

Over the next few lessons we will gradually introduce and progress through the meditation techniques of ajapa japa. It can consist of various numbers of stages depending on the method adopted; we will give five stages¹.

Ajapa is an integral part of kriya yoga. Furthermore, it is a great help in developing breath and mantra awareness in preparation for kriya yoga. In fact, with good reason, it is said that kriya yoga practices must be preceded by extensive practice of ajapa japa. We therefore urge you to practise ajapa regularly; and by regularly we don't mean once a week, but every day.

All of life throbs with pulsations of expansion and contraction, of intake and expulsion, of prana and apana. Every molecule, every aspect of existence vibrates with this pulse. Everything is in a continuous and spontaneous state of cyclical change. Everything is endlessly repeating a subtle mantra.

Man throbs with this pulse of life in many ways. The most obvious are the heartbeat and respiration. The ancient yogis developed a wonderful yet simple method of using this constant beat of life as a means to calming the mind and raising levels of awareness and understanding. They realized that the breath is constant rhythm that continuously repeats a mantra. This mantra is normally known as *Soham* or *Saham*. The practice is called *ajapa*.

Definition

Japa can be defined as the continuous repetition of a mantra². The suffix 'a' in front of japa implies that the process of japa becomes spontaneous. That is, japa is transformed into ajapa when the mantra repeats itself without effort; the mantra has been planted so deeply through japa that one's whole being pulsates with that mantra. Japa requires conscious effort, whereas ajapa requires no effort. It is said that japa comes from the mouth whereas ajapa comes from

the heart. Japa is the preliminary practice and ajapa is the perfection of japa.

Rationale

The aim is to create a situation where the chosen mantra repeats itself continuously and spontaneously twenty-four hours a day. The mantra should overwhelm your whole attention; it should be a permanent background to all thoughts and actions. No matter what you are doing, work or play, there should be constant awareness of the mantra. This brings about incredible one-pointedness of mind and in time all problems and mental fluctuations are soothed away.

The mantra should also be synchronized with respiration. Therefore, a person who has perfected ajapa will repeat the mantra about 21,600 times every day (i.e. 15 respirations per minute or 900 per hour). Actually, however, the number of mantra repetitions will be much less, for continuous practice of ajapa leads to such mental and physical relaxation that the breathing rate will drastically reduce. At an advanced stage the breathing rate at times may be two or three times per minute.

The whole body and mind should unceasingly vibrate with the mantra. This is not easy, for at first great mental effort is required to prevent the mind wandering here and there. Effort is required to train the mind to repeat the mantra as japa. As soon as the mind wanders then the mantra will be forgotten. But when the process becomes spontaneous as ajapa, then no effort is required. You will be forced to be attentive to the mantra; you will be attracted to the mantra like iron to a magnet. To attain this stage, however, will require much time and effort. But if the stage of continuous ajapa is reached, then one's whole life will be transformed. The mind will become a perfect reflector of experience and consciousness.

Very few people will be able to repeat the mantra throughout the day. Therefore, it is

sufficient to repeat the mantra, synchronized with the breath only for the duration of the set meditative practice of ajapa that will be described shortly. This will bring many benefits if it is done diligently, though not as many as continuous ajapa day and night.

Integration of mantra

Any mantra can be integrated with the flow of breath, but the mantra *Soham* is generally used since it arises naturally and corresponds with the actual sound of inhalation and exhalation. Listen carefully to your breath; you will hear the sound So with inhalation and Ham with exhalation. This is especially true if you do ujjayi pranayama³. Depending on the length of the breath, the sound of So will be a prolonged S-o-o-o-o; the sound of Ham will be a prolonged H-a-a-m-m-m-m. Little or no imagination is necessary. This is why the mantra *Soham* is such a powerful mantra – it arises almost naturally from the sound of the breath.

Sometimes the mantra *Soham* or *Hamsa* is used. This is also acceptable. In fact, if you can hear any other mantra sound emerging from the breath, then use it; there is absolutely no harm. In fact, there will be great gain. You can use the mantra Aum, Ram, Hreem or any other mantra if you wish. You can use your guru mantra or you can use the gayatri mantra: *Aum bhur bhuva swaha tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dheemahee dhियो yo nah prachodayat*.

In the case of the gayatri mantra, one half should be repeated with inhalation and the other half with exhalation. Any mantra can be chosen, it does not matter, for it is only a technique. The mantra should be one that comes naturally to you, and once chosen, the mantra should not be changed.

However, we advise you to adopt the *Soham* mantra, for this has been tested by yogis throughout the ages in conjunction with ajapa. It is this mantra that is most conducive to continuous awareness in union with the breath. In the *Kularnava Tantra*, Saham (or Soham) is called the *Sri Prasadapara* mantra because it gives sublime grace (*prasada*) and is regarded as the greatest (*para*) of all mantras.

Meaning of Soham

The meaning of the mantra *Soham* is not essential for the practice of ajapa. However, it is worthwhile explaining it:

So – Shiva or He

Ham – Aham or 'I am'

That is, *Soham* means 'I am He' or 'I am Shiva' or 'I am consciousness'. The mantra *Saham* can be split up in the same way (i.e. Sah + Aham) to give the same meaning.

The meaning can be remembered continuously with the practice of ajapa as a method of affirmation. It is an excellent method for those people who have had a deep transcendental experience to help in maintaining that state of awareness. It is a method of intensifying identification. But other people need not associate any meaning with the *Soham* mantra. It is not necessary in order to bring results. It is the continuous remembrance and attentiveness that is important.

Position

Ajapa can be practised in any position, any place and at any time. However, for the purpose of the fixed meditative practice that we will shortly describe, a comfortable sitting asana is best. Padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, vajrasana, swastikasana, ardha padmasana and sukhāsana can be used⁴. Shavasana can also be used, but this position easily leads to sleep⁵.

Integration of Ujjayi and Khechari Mudra

Both ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra are very simple but very powerful practices and should be integrated with ajapa to gain maximum benefits³.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 1

The following technique is stage 1 and should be practised every day until mastered, before proceeding to the next stage¹.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes and relax the whole body.

Hold the spine upright, but without excessive strain.

Tell yourself that for the duration of the practice all problems and worries will be discarded; all attention will be on the practice of ajapa japa.

When you are ready start the practice.

Firstly do ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra.

Become aware of your breathing process.

As you breathe in, know that you are breathing in. As you are breathing out, know that you are breathing out.

Be totally attentive to every incoming and outgoing breath; feel the rhythm of the flow. Carry on in this manner for a few minutes.

Then imagine that the breath is flowing between the navel and the front of the throat. On inhalation, the breath rises from the navel to the throat.

On exhalation, the breath descends from the throat to the navel.

At first, you may find this process difficult to imagine, don't worry, only try; the important thing is to be completely aware of the breath. Let the breathing become rhythmical, deep and long, but without force; the more you relax, the more the breath will automatically become slow and deep.

Continue in this manner for at least 5 minutes. Maintain awareness.

If the mind wanders, which it surely will, don't fight it, but simultaneously try to maintain the breath awareness; this is not easy but you must try.

Then you must merge and synchronize the mantra *Soham* with the up and down movement of breath in the throat and navel passage.

You must be simultaneously aware of both the rising and descending breath and the sound *Soham* produced at the throat.

The mantra and the breath must be synchronized so that:

So sounds with the upward moving inhalation, from the navel to the throat.

Ham sounds with the downward moving exhalation, from the throat to the navel.

There should be unceasing awareness of *Soham* as you breathe in and out from the navel to the throat.

If your mind wanders let it, but know that it is wandering and try to maintain mantra and breath awareness.

Continue in this manner to the end of the time that you have assigned for the practice.

Awareness

The essence of ajapa, like all other meditative techniques, is continual attentiveness to the practice being performed. There is no need to suppress the fluctuations and distractions of the mind, but you should try to simultaneously

maintain awareness of the breath and mantra. Let the mind roam; all you have to do is to remain aware.

Benefits

Ajapa gives the benefits of all other meditative practices. The benefits that you actually reap will depend entirely on your effort, regularity of practice and the degree to which your mind is now harmonized.

It is an excellent and essential preparation for kriya yoga, brings mental peace and one-pointedness of mind and leads directly to meditation.

Notes

¹ Ajapa: stage 2 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5; stage 3 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5; stage 4 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 4; stage 5 – Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5; Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

The Chakras (Part 2)

Don't make the mistake of thinking that the chakras are only awakened by a few specific forms of yoga. All paths of yoga are concerned with flowering the potential of the chakras; some more directly than others. The more direct approach is the method of kundalini, kriya and laya yoga. With karma, bhakti, jnana yoga, etc. the approach is indirect; no specific mention is made of the chakras in these systems. This does not mean that the chakras don't open, but that the chakras open as a consequence of higher levels of awareness. The chakras are opened so smoothly that they are not really felt as such. With the direct approach, the chakras are opened in order to induce a corresponding state of awareness. In the indirect approach, the chakras open as a consequence, a by-product of higher awareness. One method goes through the front door and the other goes through the back door in order to reach the same inner chamber of being.

Every religion, every mind awakening system, every spiritual system is concerned with unfolding the hidden potential of the chakras. They are all concerned with releasing the latent faculties and knowledge of the mind, and awakening of the mind implies the same thing as awakening of the chakras. The opening of the chakras means that layer upon layer of the mind is opened up . . . the closed book starts to reveal its inherent knowledge.

The granthis

The Sanskrit word *granthi* means 'knot'. In the context of the chakras, the word *granthi* is translated as 'psychic knot'. They are three in number, called the *brahma*, *vishnu* and *rudra* *granthis*. They represent levels of awareness (chakra domains) where the power of *maya* (illusion), ignorance and attachment to material things is especially strong.

They have many meanings. In the following we have given a very brief and simplified explanation of their implications.

1. *Brahma granthi*. This psychic knot functions in the region of the mooladhara chakra. It implies attachment to physical pleasures and material objects, and excessive selfishness. It also implies the ensnaring power of *tamas* – negativity, lethargy and ignorance.

2. *Vishnu granthi*. This psychic knot operates at the region of the anahata chakra. It is associated with attachment to things and people in an emotional sense. It is associated with attachment to inner psychic visions and so forth. It is connected with *rajas*, the tendency to passion and intense activities.

3. *Rudra granthi* functions in the region of the ajna chakra. It is associated with attachment to psychic powers such as telepathy, clairaudience and other mind phenomena. This psychic knot implies attachment to individuality. One must leave the sense of individual ego behind for further ascent, in the same way that a butterfly leaves the chrysalis behind in order to fly away to freedom. One must give up duality at the region of the *rudra granthi*.

All these psychic knots are obstacles or blocks on the route to *sahasrara*. They have to be progressively pierced or transcended in order for the kundalini power to rise through the chakras.

The kundalini defined

The progressive awakening of the chakras is called the raising of the *kundalini* (sometimes called the *kundali*) and is symbolized by a snake or serpent. The word *kundalini* is derived from the two Sanskrit words:

1. *Kundala*, which means 'coiled', indicating that the kundalini power is symbolized as a coiled snake residing in mooladhara chakra.
2. *Kunda*, which means 'a pit', 'depression' or 'deeper place', indicating that kundalini resides in a deeper place, the mooladhara chakra.

In English, the kundalini can be called 'the primal power' or 'the serpent power'.

In most people, kundalini sleeps or lies dormant in mooladhara chakra. At this level of awareness, the individual is awake to the world and asleep to himself. There is little realization of the potential of the mind. When the kundalini starts to awaken and rise up through the chakras, then man becomes more and more aware. Eventually, when the kundalini is fully aroused, then man is wide awake and in a state of superconsciousness. He is, in a sense, asleep to the world and in a state of yoga nidra.

Thus the kundalini symbolizes the awakening of the potential contained in the mind, the realization of the potential of each and every human being.

Sushumna defined

The sushumna is a symbolic passage (nadi) which connects all the main chakras. That is, sushumna is regarded as connecting all the different levels of consciousness. It is a symbolic passage through which the kundalini rises on its ascent from mooladhara to sahasrara.

The etymology of the word sushumna is not certain. A voluminous Sanskrit dictionary that we have in our library defines it as 'something very gracious and kind, and one of the seven principal rays of the sun, supposed to supply light and heat to the moon'. This is open to many interpretations, but it is significant that number seven once again occurs (the six chakras plus sahasrara). The sun may possibly represent the sahasrara which provides light (consciousness) to man (the moon). Also sushumna is indeed gracious for it facilitates the ascent of kundalini and the resulting bliss and knowledge.

In the *Shandiliya Upanishad* the sushumna is called the royal road (*rajapath*). The meaning of the word taro in the tarot (taro) cards is believed to be derived from the two Egyptian words: *tar* meaning 'road' and *ro* meaning 'royal'. Therefore, it seems that the meaning of the *tarot* is 'the royal path' and that the purpose of the cards is to tread the royal path. This path is the sushumna – the road to knowledge and bliss.

The sushumna is far more subtle than the physical body. However, for the purpose of yogic practices, it is regarded as being located in the centre of the spine, from top to bottom. The tantric scriptures make this very clear. In the *Sammohana Tantra* it says: "The sushumna

extends from mooladhara chakra to the abode of Brahman (sahasrara). It is located inside the spine and is the very means to all knowledge." (6:5–6)

The sushumna is the central pathway between the ida and pingala nadis¹. The ida and pingala have vast implications. They represent the internal and external aspects of existence. Sushumna implies the balance between them. That is, the kundalini arises when there is perfect harmony between the outside and inside worlds.

The sushumna is regarded as a hollow tube in which there are three more concentric tubes. Each is progressively more subtle than the previous tube (nadi) and contains the previous tubes within it. These represent the three aspects (gunas) of nature: tamas, rajas and sattwa; and consciousness.

The tubes or nadis are as follows:

1. *Sushumna* – signifying tamas
2. *Vajrini* – signifying rajas
3. *Chitrini* – signifying sattwa
4. *Brahma* – signifying consciousness

In short, tamas indicates ignorance, laziness and negativity; rajas indicates passion and activity; and sattwa represents purity, harmony and knowledge. The three aspects interplay throughout nature, in plant life, mineral life, animal life and the life of man. In an individual, any one of these aspects tends to predominate at a particular time. To raise levels of awareness tamas must be transmuted into raising of the kundalini through the central and most subtle passage, the brahma nadi.

The sushumna is regarded as being closed at its base near the mooladhara chakra. This is called the *Brahma dwara* – the gate of Brahman. This is the first gate that must be opened in order to ascend through the chakras. Yoga practices open this door and allow the kundalini to rise upwards through sushumna.

Kundalini in mythology

Mythology in all parts of the world is abundant with stories involving snakes. Many of these refer directly to the kundalini. Here we will merely give a few examples, for we don't want to become lost in an exposition on mythology.

The ancient Egyptians symbolized the kundalini as a snake rising up through the spine (sushumna). Egyptian mystics also wore a head-dress on which was fixed a snake (*uraeus*)

at the eyebrow centre. This centre is called the *bhrumadhya* in yoga and is connected directly to the ajna chakra at the top of the spine. The uraeus therefore symbolizes the ascent of the kundalini. A similar head-dress is worn by various other groups of people throughout the world, including the American Indians.

Many of the prophets of the Old Testament in the *Bible*, such as Moses, are associated with a snake-shaped staff, representing the sushumna and kundalini.

Most people have heard of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and how Eve was tempted by a snake. The snake is kundalini – it represents consciousness. According to Genesis (3.1) the snake was more subtle than any beast in the field, that is, consciousness. Originally Adam and Eve lived in higher transcendental states, heaven on earth, the Garden of Eden. But through worldliness they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Because of this, they descended to the level of the mooladhara chakra. It was worldliness that brought about their fall. Incidentally, the tree of life in the Garden of Eden symbolizes the sushumna.

The symbolism of the kundalini stretches back into the depths of time. It is believed by some people that the oldest book in the world is the *Bopal Vuh*, written many thousands of years ago by the Mayans of Central America. In the book, there is an image of the deity Quetzalcoatl, in which a multi-rayed sun is portrayed on the crown of the head. Also included is the symbolic form of the snake. It seems almost certain that this represents the sahasrara (symbolized by one thousand petals in India) and the kundalini.

The snake was venerated by almost all the ancient mystical societies, including the Druids, Orphic mysteries and so forth. The ancients regarded the snake as the symbol of wisdom and salvation. Even Christ urged his disciples to be as wise as serpents. All these attributes are directly connected with the kundalini, not only because the snake lives for many years, but also because it symbolizes kundalini.

The snake has also been associated with energy and power. A snake itself does not suggest these qualities, but that which it symbolizes, the kundalini, does.

The snake has also been associated with evil. This seems contrary to its identification

with wisdom, but this is easily explainable. The descent of the kundalini to mooladhara implies lower levels of awareness, general disharmony and limitations, that is, evil. The reascent of the kundalini means knowledge. Thus the attributes assigned to the kundalini (snake) depend on the viewpoint, whether you are looking from mooladhara upwards or from ajna chakra downwards. It is the descent that is associated with evil.

There are also myths which tell of snakes descending to the earth during the creation of the world, which symbolizes the manifestation of all things of name and form, including man, through the descent of the kundalini down the different chakra levels. In man kundalini eventually resides in mooladhara chakra; in other beings and objects, the descent is to even lower levels.

The implications of kundalini

It is very easy to become caught up in superlatives and vague descriptions of kundalini. It is ineffable, so we will confine ourselves to a very simple and basic description.

In tantra and yoga, kundalini is regarded as feminine and is also called Shakti. She is the link to higher awareness and bliss. She is the revealer of all mantras and the means by which bliss trickles down from the eternal source, sahasrara, to individual beings.

The kundalini is the creator, sustainer and dissolver of all centres of being, including man. She creates by descending through the different chakra levels (*shruti krama*: process of creation); sustains by abiding in mooladhara chakra; and dissolves by ascending through the chakra levels (*laya krama*: process of absorption).

When kundalini descends to the lower chakras then she is the cause of delusion, limitation and lack of knowledge: maya. She is known as *jagan-mohini*, the world bewilderer, causing man to become caught up, ensnared and deluded by the outside world of name and form. As she descends, kundalini becomes progressively more gross and loses her power and subtlety.

In animals, insects, plants and all so-called inert objects, kundalini resides and sustains from levels below mooladhara chakra. In fact, the tantric scriptures list seven more chakra levels which exist below mooladhara: atala,

vitala, sutala, talatala, rasatala, mahatala and patala.

At these levels there is lack of any form of self-awareness that distinguishes man; this faculty does not arise until the level of the mooladhara chakra. We will not discuss these lower chakra levels for they are not important with regard to human aspiration and yogic practices.

In man kundalini normally resides and sustains from the level of the mooladhara chakra. The kundalini is said to dream at this level; it is the dream of everyday wakeful life. While she sleeps, man retains a strong sense of individuality and self-centredness; he is awake only to the world of name and form, and unaware of the untapped potential that is his heritage. At this level, man is really asleep; it is the tamasic state of being. The situation can be summarized as follows: when the kundalini sleeps in mooladhara, then man is awake to normal levels of being; this is really deep sleep. When kundalini wakes up, then man as an individual begins to arouse from his twenty-four hours a day waking slumber.

The reascent of kundalini through the chakras implies the reversal of creation. She becomes the cause of awakening, bliss and realization. Shakti returns to its source at sahasrara. As the kundalini progressively rises through the chakras, so the veils of maya are removed. It is this maya that clouds consciousness. Maya is thicker in the lower chakras and nil in sahasrara. As she awakens, the barriers of individuality begin to break down and evaporate like a mirage. One's self-identification gradually expands to include more and more.

Eventually kundalini merges with *maha kundalini* (great kundalini) – sahasrara. She merges with Shiva (consciousness) with whom she is identical. In her formless form she is consciousness; in her formed form she is Shakti, the power of manifestation.

The last few paragraphs can be summarized as: descent of the kundalini implies increasing separation, disidentification and lack of knowledge. Ascent implies increasing integration, identification, bliss and a more harmonized, wider view of one's being in relation to life and others. The kundalini, as a centre of consciousness and power, abides in mooladhara chakra in individual man. It abides in sahasrara when

individuality and mind are transcended. It occupies intermediate chakra levels according to the awareness and identification of the ego. It is the same kundalini power, but viewed from different levels of awareness, understanding and identification.

The kundalini both binds and liberates. It is both the cause of the fall and illumination. In the tantric scriptures, *Hevajra Tantra*, it says explicitly: "One must rise by that which one falls." That is, kundalini only shows herself to those people who seek her. To these she gives liberation; to others she is the cause of bondage.

In order to break down too much attachment to logical understanding of the kundalini, we will now tell you something that seems to contradict what we have already said, but which actually does not. The kundalini, in a higher sense, does not really abide in the mooladhara chakra or anywhere else. It ever abides in sahasrara. It does not really rise through the chakras. Each of the chakras is connected to sahasrara, and each in turn can turn on the power of kundalini in sahasrara. The chakras are really switches that make the kundalini seem to ascend; it actually remains in sahasrara, the reservoir. The kundalini that is said to abide in the mooladhara of each human being is really a reflection of that which always abides in sahasrara. Contemplate on this apparent paradox. Tread the path of jnana yoga. If you discover the answer, then you will find that there is no contradiction – kundalini is both in mooladhara and in sahasrara. But please don't take our word for it; find out for yourself.

The kundalini is often associated with sexual energy. In fact, in tantra, under specified conditions, sexual energy is used as a method of raising the kundalini and expanding levels of awareness. This can be done in two ways: either by actual sexual intercourse in a prescribed manner, or by abstaining from sexual relationships. In both cases, the sexual energy is transmuted. This process is called *urdhvaretas*, which means the power and energy behind sex is directed upwards to induce higher states of consciousness.

Many people tried to identify sexual energy directly with kundalini but this misses the real meaning, for it means much more than sexual energy. Sexual energy is merely a small part and aspect of the full power of kundalini.

The awakening of kundalini indicates greater and greater levels of mind. As she rises through the chakras, so one becomes more and more concentrated. The fluctuations of the mind begin to settle. The mind becomes more and more like a placid, calm sea, instead of a tumultuous, stormy ocean. One's awareness begins to flow as smoothly as the flow of oil from a vessel. One becomes aware of something that continually rivets the attention. The whole mind starts to flow in one direction and becomes a vehicle of bliss instead of unhappiness. Such is the boon of opening the chakras and awakening the kundalini.

The purpose of yoga is to retread the path back to the source. In other words, the aim is to raise the kundalini (Shakti) so that she unites with her husband (Shiva) in sahasrara. Poetically, it is said that through the practice of yoga, kundalini develops an overwhelming desire to unite with her husband and for this reason awakens from her slumber in mooladhara. The awakening transforms everyday life into bliss. The world remains the same but one's changed attitude, feelings and awareness transform everything into a fulfilling, joyful experience.

Sound of the kundalini

Various ancient mystical societies conceived that the highest heaven (sahasrara) has the same musical tone as the earth (mooladhara chakra) and that it differs only in the musical pitch. Since there are seven basic notes in the musical scale, then these relate directly to the different chakra levels.

According to tantra, everything is a manifestation of *shabda*, subtle sound vibration. This is really another way of defining the kundalini. Sound in the form of mantras can also be used to raise the kundalini. It should therefore not be surprising to know that the cosmic sound Aum symbolizes and is kundalini. Aum arises in the realm of the sahasrara and then descends through the various chakra levels, until it manifests gross matter, organic life, including man. In the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* it says: "Aum resides in all created things (i.e. it is the kundalini). Generally, it remains downwards enjoying the material world." (v. 73) In man, Aum or kundalini resides in mooladhara.

The letters of Aum represent many things, but they notably indicate *tamas*, *rajas* and

sattwa. That is: A – *sattwa*, U – *rajas* and M – *tamas*. As we have already explained earlier, *tamas* predominates in the lower chakras, *rajas* in the middle chakras and *sattwa* in the higher chakras. Therefore, Aum symbolizes the progressive ascent of kundalini through the chakras. The symbol Aum as a whole symbolizes the sahasrara. But Aum is not only a symbol, it can also be used as a mantra to raise the kundalini when used under the right circumstances.

It is also significant that the well-known yogic scripture, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, praises nada yoga as being a powerful method of raising the kundalini. The following are selections: "Salutations to the sushumna, kundalini and the nectar secreted from the moon (bindu); O Manonmani (Brahman or the absolute), salutations to you, the source of supreme power and consciousness." (4:64) "Sri Gorakhnatha (a great yogi) described numerous types of *laya yoga* (methods of raising the kundalini). Amongst these *nadanusandhana* (discovering the source of nada) is the best." (4:66) "By this the brahma granthi is pierced and a wonderful bliss arises from the void. A tinkling sound can be heard emanating from the anahata chakra." (4:70)

"In the second stage prana enters the sushumna; the posture of the yogi becomes steady and he becomes wise like a divine being." (4:72) "Then the vishnu granthi is pierced and overwhelming bliss is experienced. In the shoonya (void) the sound of a bheri (type of musical instrument) is heard." (4:73) "In the final stage, when the prana enters the ajna chakra, the rudra granthi is pierced. The sound of a veena (musical instrument) takes place like the sound of a flute." (4:76) This describes the process of raising the kundalini. The practice of nada yoga is an excellent technique and if you are inclined, we suggest you practise it earnestly².

Incidentally, music is a powerful medium for producing changes in one's state of mind. Under the right conditions, it has a direct influence on the chakras. It depends on sensitivity. In fact, many great musicians attained elevated states of awareness through sound because of their heightened sensitivity. Music becomes a particularly powerful method of raising the kundalini when it is combined with *bhakti yoga*.

The chakras, physical organs and trigger points

In recent years, great efforts have been made to relate chakras directly to physical organs in the body. Also, people have tried to identify the kundalini with specific nerve pathways. We feel that this is not very valid. The chakras function on a pranic level. They definitely have an influence on the physical body, but the chakras should not be associated and identified with specific physical organs as such.

If you dissect the human body you will find no sign of the chakras. This does not mean that they don't exist, but that they are more subtle. It is only possible to see them through methods of modern science, such as Kirlian photography, or to experience them in states of supersensitivity.

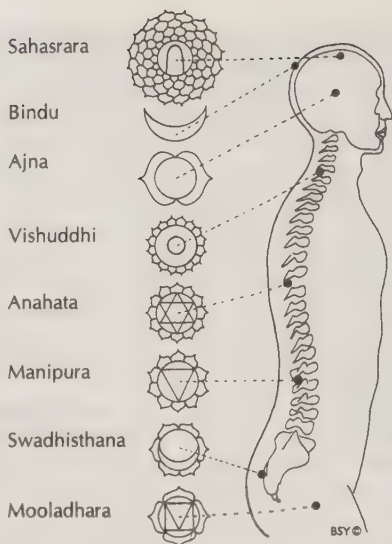
However, the focal point of the chakras can be assigned a definite location within the framework of the body. The chakras can be regarded as functioning at these definite points, though their influence and implications extend much deeper than the physical realms. Don't make the mistake of identifying the chakras with the physical organs in the body.

Think of the chakras as mountains in the sea. Only the peaks are visible and these are comparable to the physical aspects or influence of the chakras. Most of the island, and certainly the base, lies hidden below the waves. It is the same with the chakras: they mainly lie below the surface of normal perception. Their root lies behind the scenes, just as the base of the chakras comes from the mind. Yet at the same time, stimulation of the physical aspects of the chakras will give some feedback to the psychic realms. There will be stimulation of the deeper realms of the mind. This is the purpose of chakra stimulation. This stimulation can be physical, as in the case of acupuncture, or both physical and mental as in the case of yogic practices, such as kriya yoga.

You should regard the physical location of the chakras as trigger points for deeper realms of the mind. Try not to become involved in relating the chakras to specific physical organs of the body.

Chakra locations

The accompanying diagram indicates the physical locations of the trigger points of the chakras.



Don't take these positions too literally, but rather take them as physical switches for the more subtle chakras. You should note that most of the chakras lie within the spine; mooladhara is outside the bottom of the spine and ajna is at the top of the spine; bindu, which is not strictly a chakra, is at the back of the head. We have shown sahasrara in the centre of the crown of the head. This is entirely symbolic. You should carefully note the exact locations and relate them to your own body. This is essential for the forthcoming practice of kriya yoga. Part 3 of this discussion can be found in the next lesson³.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

² Nada yoga: Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4; Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 2



BSY©

Swadhisthana

Swadhisthana Chakra

The accompanying picture is a symbolic representation of the swadhisthana chakra, the second of the main chakras, coming immediately above mooladhara chakra¹, both in the physical location of the trigger point and the plane of awareness.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *swa* means 'one's own' and *adhithana* means 'dwelling place', 'residence'. Therefore, *swa*+*adhithana* = *swadhisthana*, which means 'one's own abode'. This chakra is regarded as being the substratum, the basis of individual human existence. This is explainable when one knows that this chakra is generally associated with the unconscious mind with its storehouse of mental impressions – *samskaras*. Individual being takes root in the unconscious mind. The many instinctive drives that are felt at the level of swadhisthana chakra bubble up from the depths of the unconscious mind. Swadhisthana is indeed the basis, the abode from which most people express themselves in the world. It is their basis for living life.

It is also said that swadhisthana chakra was once the seat of the kundalini, but that there was a fall, a further fall, and kundalini descended to the mooladhara chakra. Therefore, it is said that swadhisthana is the real root centre of man and not the mooladhara chakra. As such, it is called 'one's own abode'.

Chakra symbolism

Refer to the colour illustration. There are six petals on the lotus which is coloured vermilion. On many traditional pictures the Sanskrit letters *bam*, *bham*, *mam*, *yam*, *ram* and *lam* are written on the petals. The central portion of the picture contains a white crescent moon. The bija (seed) mantra is *vam*.

Attributes

The swadhisthana chakra represents the level of being where one is primarily concerned

with seeking pleasurable sensations. One is motivated to obtain pleasure through the sense organs in the form of food, sex, wine, etc. It is very similar to the mooladhara chakra, except here there is more appreciation of the enjoyment of the pleasures in themselves. At the mooladhara chakra, pleasurable sensations are sought in order to satisfy the need for security. Swadhisthana is the level where people motivate their whole life to attaining pleasure in the way that suits them. The world, all things and other people are viewed according to the amount of pleasure that they can bring.

As we have already pointed out, swadhisthana is the level where *samskaras* (subconscious and unconscious mental impressions) begin to show themselves. They become manifest very clearly in overwhelming cravings for food, sex, etc. This is the level of man that Freud was very much concerned with. He did not realize that man's nature extends well beyond this level.

In *The Serpent Power* by John Woodroffe, the attributes of swadhisthana are given as credulity, suspicion, disdain, false knowledge and pitilessness. These are from original tantric texts.

This is as much as we want to say about the characteristics of the swadhisthana chakra, for mere knowledge of these attributes is not very useful. Furthermore, they are arbitrary in that they are subjective. They are only manifestations of that level of awareness and don't in any way indicate the experience of that awareness level.

It is said that most people in the world today predominantly function at this chakra level.

Chakra kshetram

In kriya yoga practices the trigger points of all the main chakras are used. These trigger points ascend from mooladhara to ajna chakra, following the contours of the spine between

the swadhisthana and ajna chakras. The swadhisthana, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi chakras are also regarded as having physical counterparts on the front surface of the body. They lie directly in front of the corresponding chakras and on the same horizontal plane. Each of these frontal trigger points is called *chakra kshetram*. They can be regarded as reflections of the original chakra trigger points. The reflection of the swadhisthana chakra is called the *swadhisthana kshetram*. The same applies to the other three chakras – manipura, anahata and vishuddhi.

These frontal centres or kshetrams are essential in kriya yoga techniques. It is necessary to be able to locate them. Therefore, in this topic and in the next three lessons we will outline practices that increase sensitivity to both the chakra trigger points and the corresponding kshetrams².

Location

The physical trigger point of the swadhisthana chakra is at the base of the spine, at the coccyx (the tailbone). If you place your hand on the bottom of the spine, you will feel a small bulb at the lowest point just above the anus. This is the coccyx bone and the region of the physical trigger point of the swadhisthana chakra.

The physical location of the swadhisthana kshetram is at the level of the pubic bone in front of the body. It is just above the sexual organ directly in front of the coccyx bone.

It can be regarded as being on the skin surface.

Differentiation between mooladhara and swadhisthana

It is important to be able to discern the difference between the physical location of the mooladhara chakra and both the swadhisthana chakra and kshetram. You should know the difference in position both 'anatomically and you should also be able to feel the difference with the eyes closed. As such, we suggest that you first of all spend some time locating the mooladhara chakra¹, then attempt the simple practice that we will shortly describe to locate the swadhisthana chakra and kshetram. This will enable you to more clearly discern and distinguish the different locations.

Remember, the mooladhara chakra is located in the perineum between the legs. It is

roughly midway between the swadhisthana chakra and the swadhisthana kshetram, but a little lower. At first it may be difficult to feel and differentiate between these positions, but with practice it will gradually become easy.

SWADHISTHANA CHAKRA LOCATION

Technique

Take a comfortable sitting pose.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Stage 1: location of mooladhara chakra

Direct all your attention to the mooladhara chakra region¹.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Stage 2: location of swadhisthana chakra

Try to feel the position of the swadhisthana chakra at the coccyx.

The best way is to practise ashwini mudra with rapid contractions³.

Try to feel pressure waves spreading out from the place of physical contraction.

Imagine that the base of the spine (coccyx) is the wooden support of a pier above the sea; the waves of contraction are the strong sea waves striking it.

Focus your whole attention on the base of the spine and feel the pressure waves.

Continue this for a few minutes.

Then do the next stage.

Stage 3: swadhisthana kshetram location

Focus your attention on the front surface of the body directly in front of the coccyx.

Practise ashwini mudra.

Feel the pressure waves emanating outwards and striking the pubic bone.

Fix your whole attention on the centre of the swadhisthana kshetram.

Do this for a few minutes.

Stage 4: mental location

For a few minutes be aware mentally of the blood pulse at the mooladhara chakra.

Then try to feel the blood pulse at the swadhisthana chakra.

Practise this for a few minutes.

Then feel the pulse beat at the swadhisthana kshetram.

Continue in this way for a few minutes.

The important thing is that with practice you should clearly feel the difference between these three trigger points.

This is the end of the practice.

You can extend the practice by doing any of the stages that you find most difficult.

Duration of practice

Try to practise for at least fifteen minutes every day until it is mastered. In this way you will be fully prepared for the next stage².

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

² Manipura chakra – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3;
Anahata chakra – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2;
Vishuddhi chakra – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

Asanas: Practice

Matsyasana and supta vajrasana are two excellent backward bending asanas. They are perfectly suited as counterposes for forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana¹, ardha padma paschimottanasana, janu sirshasana², etc., as well as inverted asanas such as sarvangasana³. They also give characteristic benefits in their own right.

We are introducing them together because they give similar benefits. Generally, there is no need to practise both in an asana program. Choose the one that you like best.

MATSYASANA (FISH POSE)

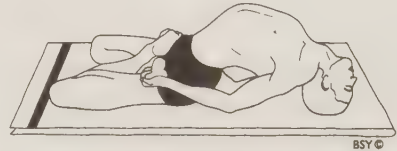
In Sanskrit the word *matsya* means 'fish'. Therefore, this asana can be translated as 'the fish pose'. At first this may seem a strange name for an asana that seems to bear no resemblance whatsoever to any kind of fish. However, if you use a little imagination you can see that the folded legs in padmasana resemble the tail of a fish; the rest of the body represents the body of the fish, and the head corresponds to the head of the fish. This is not difficult to imagine. But there is a better reason why this asana is called the fish pose: it is an excellent position for floating in water for prolonged periods of time.

The folded legs change the position of the centre of gravity (the centre of weight in the body); it moves nearer the head. This means that the head can be held higher above the water, allowing ease in respiration. Furthermore, since the legs are locked in a firm position, the body becomes more compact and rigid and therefore able to float in water with much less effort.

Technique – classical pose

In order to do the classical pose one must be able to sit in padmasana⁴. If you cannot sit in padmasana, then you can do either of the variations that we will shortly describe. The

aim of course should be to eventually master the classical pose, but until this stage you can at least reap the benefits by practising the simpler variation.



Stage 1: starting position

Sit in padmasana⁴.

If you cannot sit in padmasana please don't try to force your legs.

Relax the whole body.

Stage 2: leaning backwards

Lean slightly backwards.

Place the hands on the floor slightly behind and to the side of the buttocks.

Support the weight of the body on the straight arms.

Bend one of the arms, allowing the forearm and elbow to rest on the ground; to do this you will have to twist your body to one side.

Then slowly bend the other arm so that both elbows rest on the ground.

At this stage the trunk and head should be supported above the ground behind the buttocks.

Then take the final pose.

Stage 3: final position – alternative A

Bend your head backwards so that you can see the floor behind your head.

Stretch the front of the neck as much as is comfortable.

Slowly slide your arms forwards away from your head and lower the top of the head towards the ground.

Gently allow the top of the head to support the body weight.

Adjust the position of the head so that the maximum arch of the back is attained.

Then relax the arms, allowing the head (and the buttocks and legs) to support the weight of the body.

If possible try to grasp the big toes with the hands; if this is too difficult place the hands on the thighs or on the floor.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Close your eyes. Be aware of breathing.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then return to the starting position by executing stages 2 and 3 in reverse; that is, using the arms to raise the body back to the upright position.

Stage 3: final position – alternative B

This stage can be done after stage 2 as an alternative.

Slowly slide the arms forwards from the end of stage 2 allowing the back of the head and the spine to rest on the floor.

Your face should be directed towards the ceiling.

Place the hands under the head with the palms open and facing upwards, the fingers interlocked.

The back of the head should rest in the open palms.

Without straining try to push your bent elbows towards the ground; with practice you should be able to rest the elbows on the ground.

Relax the whole body.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Then release the position of the arms and hands.

Return to the starting position using the arms in turn to raise the body in the reverse order to that described in stage 2.

Note: it is important that the body is lowered into the final pose and also raised from the final pose to the starting position by using the arms as described in stage 2. Don't throw your body backwards for it is very easy to injure the spine. The movement should be done with control and care.

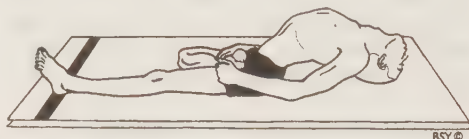
Final position

You can choose any of the alternative final poses or if you wish you can do both. Each has a distinctive influence on the body. Alternative

A gives the best flexion of the spine and neck. Alternative B has a notable influence on the abdomen and chest, giving them a powerful stretch that massages the internal organs and nerves.

Variations for beginners

The following two variations are simplified forms for beginners. They can be done by those people who cannot sit in padmasana. They give nearly equivalent benefits as the classical form, though at a lower level.



Variation 1: in ardha padmasana

Sit on the floor with the two legs in front of the body.

Fold one of the legs into ardha padmasana (half lotus pose) keeping the other leg straight⁴. Do stage 2 described for the classical form of matsyasana.

Then do alternative A (don't do alternative B for there will be little or no benefits).

In the final pose hold the toes and ankle of the folded leg with both hands.

Make sure that the back is arched as much as the flexibility of your back will allow.

This is the final pose.

Relax the body.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of breathing.

Stay in the final pose for some time.

Then return to the starting position.

Repeat the same practice with the other leg folded.



Variation 2: with both legs straight

Sit on the floor with both legs straight in front of the body.

Do stage 2 as described for the classical asana. Bend your head backwards and look at the floor behind the head.

Gently lower the head to the ground by sliding the arms away from the head towards the feet. Accentuate the upwards arch of the spine and then let the head support the weight of the body. Then place the arms either on the thighs or let them rest on the floor.

Close the eyes.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply with awareness.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable duration and then return to the starting position.

Note: the final stage is the equivalent of alternative A; don't do alternative B for this will mean that you will merely lie flat on your back. This of course can give benefits, but has no connection with matsyasana.

Breathing, awareness and duration

In stages 1 and 2 the breathing is not important. In the final stage the breathing should be deep and slow.

While moving into the final pose be attentive to the slow physical movements. In the final pose be aware of deep and slow breathing.

The asana can be done for up to five minutes. A reasonable duration to reap benefits is three minutes.

Counterpose

Matsyasana is an excellent counterpose for all forward bending asanas and for sarvangasana. Therefore, it can be done after any of these types of asanas. It is the ideal counterpose for sarvangasana since it stretches the neck in the opposite direction, releasing any muscular tension³.

Limitations

People who suffer from peptic ulcers, hernia or any serious spinal ailment should not do matsyasana without expert guidance. Ladies in an advanced state of pregnancy should also not attempt to do this asana.

Benefits

Matsyasana gives an excellent massage of the abdominal organs, thereby helping to alleviate various types of digestive disorders.

The ribcage and lungs are given an accentuated stretch which helps to improve the breathing process by allowing the chest to expand to full capacity during respiration. It is therefore a good asana for those people who

suffer from asthma, bronchitis or any other lung ailments.

Matsyasana loosens up the whole spine and removes any tendency towards round shoulders. The associated nerve connections and blood supply are rendered more efficient. The nerves in the neck, and the thyroid gland are particularly influenced.

The pelvic region is also given a good stretch; this asana is therefore useful for ladies in preventing or removing various forms of sexual malfunctions. The pressure of the legs on the thighs greatly reduces the blood circulation in the legs; the femoral arteries are compressed. The blood flow is diverted to the pelvic organs including the sexual glands (testes and prostate in males and ovaries in females), which helps to revitalize these organs and eliminate various types of associated ailments. Youthfulness and vitality are also closely related to the testes and ovaries – matsyasana therefore helps to bring about these desirable attributes.

It is also a useful asana for loosening up the legs in preparation for sitting in still postures for meditation practice.

SUPTA VAJRASANA (SLEEPING THUNDERBOLT POSE)

The Sanskrit word *supta* means 'sleeping' and *vajra* is the name of a pranic channel (nadi) connected with sexual energy. Vajra also means 'thunderbolt' the so-called weapon of Indra, the king of the gods in Hindu mythology. In this context, it is also associated with sexual energy. This asana is so called because it helps to transmute sexual energy into more subtle forms of energy.

There is no equivalent English word for vajra, therefore any translation is bound to be inaccurate. Supta vajrasana is called various names, the most common of which are 'the sleeping pelvic pose', 'the supine pelvic pose' and 'the sleeping thunderbolt pose'. The Sanskrit name most aptly describes the asana.

This asana gives the same benefits as matsyasana, therefore it can replace matsyasana in your program.

Technique – classical form

To do the classical form of the asana you should have a reasonably supple back and

flexible legs. If you find this classical form too difficult you can practise the simplified form instead.

Stage 1: starting position

Sit in vajrasana⁵.

The knees can be together or separated.

Stage 2: leaning backwards

Do stage 2 as described for the classical pose of matsyasana.



Stage 3: final pose – alternative A

Do stage 3: final position – alternative A as described for the technique of matsyasana.

The final pose is illustrated above.



Stage 3: final pose – alternative B

This is quite difficult if your legs are stiff. Be sure not to strain. If this alternative is too difficult, do the simpler alternative A instead. The movement is performed in the same way as described for matsyasana stage 3: final position – alternative B.

The arms can be folded behind the head in the final pose as shown.

Precaution

Special care should be taken not to strain the muscles and ligaments of the thighs and knees. In this context it is important not to unfold the legs from the final pose. You should raise the body to the starting position and then straighten your legs. If you try to straighten your legs from the final position you will easily injure them. Many people have found this out from bitter experience.

Further details

All other details: breathing, awareness, duration, counterpose, limitations and benefits are as given for matsyasana.

Simplified variation for beginners

Those people who have stiff legs should not attempt the classical form of *supta vajrasana*. Instead, they should do the simplified form where the legs are kept straight in front of the body. That is, the legs are not folded under the buttocks in *vajrasana*. This variation is exactly the same as 'Method 2: with both legs straight' described under the heading 'Techniques for Beginners' in our description of *matsyasana*.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

⁴ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 1)

Over the next few lessons we will gradually introduce and progress through the meditation techniques of ajapa japa. It can consist of various numbers of stages depending on the method adopted; we will give five stages¹.

Ajapa is an integral part of kriya yoga. Furthermore, it is a great help in developing breath and mantra awareness in preparation for kriya yoga. In fact, with good reason, it is said that kriya yoga practices must be preceded by extensive practice of ajapa japa. We therefore urge you to practise ajapa regularly; and by regularly we don't mean once a week, but every day.

All of life throbs with pulsations of expansion and contraction, of intake and expulsion, of prana and apana. Every molecule, every aspect of existence vibrates with this pulse. Everything is in a continuous and spontaneous state of cyclical change. Everything is endlessly repeating a subtle mantra.

Man throbs with this pulse of life in many ways. The most obvious are the heartbeat and respiration. The ancient yogis developed a wonderful yet simple method of using this constant beat of life as a means to calming the mind and raising levels of awareness and understanding. They realized that the breath is constant rhythm that continuously repeats a mantra. This mantra is normally known as *Soham* or *Saham*. The practice is called *ajapa*.

Definition

Japa can be defined as the continuous repetition of a mantra². The suffix 'a' in front of japa implies that the process of japa becomes spontaneous. That is, japa is transformed into ajapa when the mantra repeats itself without effort; the mantra has been planted so deeply through japa that one's whole being pulsates with that mantra. Japa requires conscious effort, whereas ajapa requires no effort. It is said that japa comes from the mouth whereas ajapa comes from

the heart. Japa is the preliminary practice and ajapa is the perfection of japa.

Rationale

The aim is to create a situation where the chosen mantra repeats itself continuously and spontaneously twenty-four hours a day. The mantra should overwhelm your whole attention; it should be a permanent background to all thoughts and actions. No matter what you are doing, work or play, there should be constant awareness of the mantra. This brings about incredible one-pointedness of mind and in time all problems and mental fluctuations are soothed away.

The mantra should also be synchronized with respiration. Therefore, a person who has perfected ajapa will repeat the mantra about 21,600 times every day (i.e. 15 respirations per minute or 900 per hour). Actually, however, the number of mantra repetitions will be much less, for continuous practice of ajapa leads to such mental and physical relaxation that the breathing rate will drastically reduce. At an advanced stage the breathing rate at times may be two or three times per minute.

The whole body and mind should unceasingly vibrate with the mantra. This is not easy, for at first great mental effort is required to prevent the mind wandering here and there. Effort is required to train the mind to repeat the mantra as japa. As soon as the mind wanders then the mantra will be forgotten. But when the process becomes spontaneous as ajapa, then no effort is required. You will be forced to be attentive to the mantra; you will be attracted to the mantra like iron to a magnet. To attain this stage, however, will require much time and effort. But if the stage of continuous ajapa is reached, then one's whole life will be transformed. The mind will become a perfect reflector of experience and consciousness.

Very few people will be able to repeat the mantra throughout the day. Therefore, it is

sufficient to repeat the mantra, synchronized with the breath only for the duration of the set meditative practice of ajapa that will be described shortly. This will bring many benefits if it is done diligently, though not as many as continuous ajapa day and night.

Integration of mantra

Any mantra can be integrated with the flow of breath, but the mantra *Soham* is generally used since it arises naturally and corresponds with the actual sound of inhalation and exhalation. Listen carefully to your breath; you will hear the sound So with inhalation and Ham with exhalation. This is especially true if you do *ujjayi pranayama*³. Depending on the length of the breath, the sound of So will be a prolonged S-o-o-o-o; the sound of Ham will be a prolonged H-a-a-m-m-m-m. Little or no imagination is necessary. This is why the mantra *Soham* is such a powerful mantra – it arises almost naturally from the sound of the breath.

Sometimes the mantra *Soham* or *Hamsa* is used. This is also acceptable. In fact, if you can hear any other mantra sound emerging from the breath, then use it; there is absolutely no harm. In fact, there will be great gain. You can use the mantra Aum, Ram, Hreem or any other mantra if you wish. You can use your guru mantra or you can use the gayatri mantra: *Aum bhur bhuva swaha tatsaviturvarenyam bhargo devasya dheemahhe dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*.

In the case of the gayatri mantra, one half should be repeated with inhalation and the other half with exhalation. Any mantra can be chosen, it does not matter, for it is only a technique. The mantra should be one that comes naturally to you, and once chosen, the mantra should not be changed.

However, we advise you to adopt the *Soham* mantra, for this has been tested by yogis throughout the ages in conjunction with ajapa. It is this mantra that is most conducive to continuous awareness in union with the breath. In the *Kularnava Tantra*, *Saham* (or *Soham*) is called the *Sri Prasada*para mantra because it gives sublime grace (*prasada*) and is regarded as the greatest (*para*) of all mantras.

Meaning of Soham

The meaning of the mantra *Soham* is not essential for the practice of ajapa. However, it is worthwhile explaining it:

So – Shiva or He

Ham – Aham or 'I am'

That is, *Soham* means 'I am He' or 'I am Shiva' or 'I am consciousness'. The mantra *Saham* can be split up in the same way (i.e. Sah + Aham) to give the same meaning.

The meaning can be remembered continuously with the practice of ajapa as a method of affirmation. It is an excellent method for those people who have had a deep transcendental experience to help in maintaining that state of awareness. It is a method of intensifying identification. But other people need not associate any meaning with the *Soham* mantra. It is not necessary in order to bring results. It is the continuous remembrance and attentiveness that is important.

Position

Ajapa can be practised in any position, any place and at any time. However, for the purpose of the fixed meditative practice that we will shortly describe, a comfortable sitting asana is best. *Padmasana*, *siddhasana*, *siddha yoni asana*, *vajrasana*, *swastikasana*, *ardha padmasana* and *sukhasana* can be used⁴. *Shavasana* can also be used, but this position easily leads to sleep⁵.

Integration of Ujjayi and Khechari Mudra

Both *ujjayi pranayama* and *khechari mudra* are very simple but very powerful practices and should be integrated with ajapa to gain maximum benefits³.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 1

The following technique is stage 1 and should be practised every day until mastered, before proceeding to the next stage¹.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable position.

Close your eyes and relax the whole body.

Hold the spine upright, but without excessive strain.

Tell yourself that for the duration of the practice all problems and worries will be discarded; all attention will be on the practice of ajapa japa.

When you are ready start the practice.

Firstly do *ujjayi pranayama* and *khechari mudra*.

Become aware of your breathing process. As you breathe in, know that you are breathing in. As you are breathing out, know that you are breathing out.

Be totally attentive to every incoming and outgoing breath; feel the rhythm of the flow. Carry on in this manner for a few minutes. Then imagine that the breath is flowing between the navel and the front of the throat. On inhalation, the breath rises from the navel to the throat.

On exhalation, the breath descends from the throat to the navel.

At first, you may find this process difficult to imagine, don't worry, only try; the important thing is to be completely aware of the breath. Let the breathing become rhythmical, deep and long, but without force; the more you relax, the more the breath will automatically become slow and deep.

Continue in this manner for at least 5 minutes. Maintain awareness.

If the mind wanders, which it surely will, don't fight it, but simultaneously try to maintain the breath awareness; this is not easy but you must try.

Then you must merge and synchronize the mantra *Soham* with the up and down movement of breath in the throat and navel passage.

You must be simultaneously aware of both the rising and descending breath and the sound *Soham* produced at the throat.

The mantra and the breath must be synchronized so that:

So sounds with the upward moving inhalation, from the navel to the throat.

Ham sounds with the downward moving exhalation, from the throat to the navel.

There should be unceasing awareness of *Soham* as you breathe in and out from the navel to the throat.

If your mind wanders let it, but know that it is wandering and try to maintain mantra and breath awareness.

Continue in this manner to the end of the time that you have assigned for the practice.

Awareness

The essence of ajapa, like all other meditative techniques, is continual attentiveness to the practice being performed. There is no need to suppress the fluctuations and distractions of the mind, but you should try to simultaneously

maintain awareness of the breath and mantra. Let the mind roam; all you have to do is to remain aware.

Benefits

Ajapa gives the benefits of all other meditative practices. The benefits that you actually reap will depend entirely on your effort, regularity of practice and the degree to which your mind is now harmonized.

It is an excellent and essential preparation for kriya yoga, brings mental peace and one-pointedness of mind and leads directly to meditation.

Notes

¹ Ajapa: stage 2 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5; stage 3 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5; stage 4 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 4; stage 5 – Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5; Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Daily Practice Program

Two of the practices that we have given in this lesson, swadhisthana chakra location and ajapa, stage 1, are directly related to the practices of kriya yoga. Therefore, we urge you to practise them regularly every day. If you don't have the time, try to make time. They must be mastered in order to gain maximum benefits from kriya yoga.

In kriya yoga, it is important to be able to sit in siddhasana (or siddha yoni asana for ladies) and/or padmasana. If you can already sit comfortably in these positions then there is no problem, but if you cannot, we suggest that you start to practise regularly the leg loosening exercises as previously described¹. Don't strain for you may injure your legs. But slowly loosen them up over a period of months.

The asanas that we have described in this lesson, matsyasana and supta vajrasana, as well as the two forward bending asanas

from Lesson 19 (janu sirshasana and ardha padma paschimottanasana) are a great help in loosening up the legs for mastery of the meditative positions. This is one of the reasons why we have introduced them at this stage. Try to incorporate them into your daily practice program.

You should continue the pranayama practice, i.e. nadi shodhana pranayama combined with uddiyana bandha². It is an advanced technique and requires some months of practice before being perfected. If you find it easy with the ratio 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2, then you can increase the duration of the actual times of each ratio, but keeping the actual ratio the same. Conversely, if you find the practice too difficult, you should reduce the duration of inhalation, exhalation, etc. If necessary you should stop the practice of uddiyana bandha, doing nadi shodhana pranayama alone.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	4
Shalabhasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Janu Sirshasana or	
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Yoga Mudrasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	4
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	15
Mooladhara chakra location	15
Swadhisthana chakra location	20
Ajapa – Stage 1	21
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shalabhasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Janu Sirshasana or	
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
Mooladhara chakra location	10
Swadhisthana chakra location	15
Ajapa – Stage 1	14
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Janu Sirshasana or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
Swadhisthana chakra location	10
Ajapa – Stage 1	12
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Janu Sirshasana or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
	30

Try to find the time to practise Ajapa – stage 1 and swadhisthana chakra location.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3; Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

² Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 4

Lesson 21

"A great saint, a mahatma, a yogi, a prophet or a jnani lives on this earth like any other human being. He thinks, enjoys and eats like others. The great difference between a yogi and an ordinary man is that he has awakened a dormant faculty in man called awareness. He has unfolded this faculty, whereas the ordinary man has not. He is always aware. He is called a drashta – a seer. He is the witnesser of events. Your aim on the path to realizing and awakening your dormant potential should be to gradually unfold this faculty of awareness within yourself. You should try to become a seer."

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

The Brain

In this lesson we have introduced sirshasana – the headstand pose¹. This asana has favourable and profound effects on the whole body; however, these effects are most notable on the brain. This topic has been included so that you will more easily understand and appreciate how sirshasana can help to improve the functioning of the brain, and in turn the health of the entire body.

Introduction

The brain is the gateway between the mind and the physical body. Specifically, it can be considered as part of the physical body, but not part of the mind. Many people confuse the brain with the mind, though they are totally different entities. The brain is the switchboard between the more subtle realms of being and the physical body. It is the crossroads between the inner and outer world. It is the junction of individuality. Without it, each person would be totally helpless, unable to communicate with and act in the external environment. It is the controlling instrument or computer that allows each person to express himself in the world, to translate thoughts into actions. Without the brain you would be unable to talk, walk, sit, eat, read and a multitude of other activities that we take so much for granted and never think twice about. All these actions depend on the functioning of the brain. The better its condition the better we are able to act and express ourselves in life.

Inefficiency of the brain immediately implies reduction in our ability to remember, to concentrate, to intellectualize and so forth. Memory, concentration, the intellect and other similar abilities are mental functions, but you are unable to use them fully if the brain is not working properly. It is through the brain that thought is expressed. It is through the medium of the brain that our mental concentration can be used. It is through the instrumentality of the brain that the mental faculty of intellect can

be expressed. So we emphasize the obvious: the brain is a very important organ. It is the means by which the mind expresses itself.

The brain is also the master coordinator of the millions of functions, large and small, that are continuously occurring in the physical body, from the growth of an individual hair on the top of your head to the heartbeat rhythm; from the reactions to the sensation of a mosquito bite to the digestion of food; from the power of speech to the action of the white blood cells in healing wounds. The brain never rests. Like the heart and lungs it works day and night. It is constantly on vigil; if this were not the case then the body would suffer irreparable damage. The brain is a biochemical computer of far greater complexity than the most sophisticated digital computer produced by modern science, and it is packed away in a small space.

Just think about this idea for one minute – you are carrying a computer on your shoulders that is unimaginably more intricate than anything described in the wildest flights of fancy of even the most visionary fiction writer. The brain is so complex that modern neurologists feel totally overwhelmed; they feel the same awe as modem astronomers who look into space and realize how little they know about the outside universe; they feel like the man who tries to empty the water from the sea with a small cup. Such is the incredible nature and complexity of the brain, and each of us has one of these instruments. Few people, sad to say, use it very constructively. This organ is the instrument through which we can express the vast untapped knowledge of the mind. Yet few people ever use their brain efficiently in this way. Instead, the brain is treated in the same manner as a child would play with the latest electronic computing equipment. The potential that each person has in the mind is rarely expressed in the outside world.

Let us give a few awe inspiring facts. It is said that each square millimetre of the brain contains about fifty thousand nerve cells (neurons). This may not sound much, but it means that the entire human brain is composed of an estimated ten to thirteen thousand million neurons. Each of these neurons is connected directly to thousands of other neurons. The number of interconnections that result from this is enough to stagger even a mathematician or an astronomer, who is accustomed to large numbers.

Messages between neurons in the brain and nerve cells throughout the whole body, are transmitted both electrically and chemically. Neurons have bulbous endings (called synapses) which secrete chemicals that cross the microscopic gaps between individual cells and cause neighbouring cells to release their own chemicals in response. This process allows the transmission of current from one cell to another. The speed at which these cells can carry out their chemical transactions is amazing. Some of these chemical reactions occur in as little as one millionth of a second. As many as one hundred thousand neurons may be involved in transmitting simple data from the senses to the brain. Consider an example of a pin stuck in the thumb; this results in pain, followed by a yell and a rapid removal of the pin. The whole process occurs in less than one second. Numerous similar processes are occurring within the brain at this very moment.

The brain continuously functions throughout all its parts. This means that millions of neurons are in a state of excitability at any one moment. It is no wonder that the brain requires a vast amount of energy. The transportation of this energy to the brain depends on an efficient blood supply. Sirshasana greatly improves this blood supply. It is therefore no surprise to discover that sirshasana has been found to significantly improve its efficiency.

The brain is a constantly changing pattern of nerve impulses that performs millions of computations simultaneously. It is said that it constantly receives and analyzes approximately two million visual input data (through the two million nerve connections to the eyes) and about one hundred thousand sound inputs (from the one hundred thousand nerve connections to the ears). Besides this, the brain is continuously receiving and processing millions

of nerve impulses from other parts of the body. All this is happening in your head.

The brain and the mind

You may be wondering why we have so positively differentiated the brain and the mind. The answer is simple and obvious, namely that they are different entities. However, you should not accept our word for this, but find out for yourself through the practice of yoga. Modern science is already starting to indicate this distinction and the following are a few examples of the discoveries of modern neuroscience that show this.

Neurological investigations have found that the brain does not store memories in the same manner as a modern digital computer, where each bit of information is in a specific cell (pigeon hole). If one half of the brain is removed or put out of action, then the memory is not erased. The ability of the individual to recall a memory is impaired, but the actual memory remains intact. This may at first seem mystifying, but the answer is simple if one regards the phenomena from a yogic point of view. The memory is in the mind, and the more subtle mind is not directly influenced by the impairment of the brain apart from the fact that the mind cannot use the full capacity of the brain instrument. Therefore, interference with the brain does not necessarily affect the mind and memory. The brain is the means for the individual to express mental memories; it is a more gross instrument. The brain is a switching mechanism. Science is starting to discover facts that indicate the difference between the brain and the mind, but they have yet to make a positive statement. At present the words 'brain' and 'mind' are used almost synonymously; yet soon neurological investigations will prove that the mind is a more subtle instrument than the brain. One researcher has said that the explorers of the brain may discover a new world. Possibly he was not aware of the implications and truth behind his statement, that the new world beyond the brain is the mind.

Neuroscience has also made other interesting discoveries that have caused much perplexity since they don't fit into existing theories of the brain. For example, medical scientists have not yet found an anatomical brain centre concerned specifically with learning and knowledge.

Researchers cannot find any explanation for learning and this seems startling for it is this faculty of learning that is one of the distinctive features of man. Yet they are totally puzzled about the actual location of this learning process. One eminent neurologist has said: "There is no scientific basis for learning . . . it cannot take place . . . yet it does."

This is the point, the dilemma that modern science has reached. It knows, like everyone else, that the learning process takes place, but cannot find any part of the brain that is directly concerned with learning. How can this be? From a yogic point of view the answer is very simple: the process of learning takes place in the mind which is beyond the brain. To find the process of learning, neuroscientists will have to start practising meditation techniques. Then they will realize where the centres of learning and memory are located.

Neurologists are baffled by their investigations into the brain. In one magazine, a researcher writes: "... the brain thinks about itself as it thinks about itself thinking about itself." This seems to be a riddle and it is, if one tries to understand mental processes by investigating only the brain organ. The riddle ceases to be a riddle when one considers the functioning of the more subtle instrument – the mind and consciousness.

Basic anatomy of the brain

A volume could easily be written on the different parts and functions of the brain. In fact, in our library we have a book on human neuroanatomy which amounts to nearly one thousand pages of solid facts and figures about the brain. Here we are only interested in briefly describing the basic functions so that you can appreciate the importance of perfect functional efficiency of the brain. If you are interested in studying the subject further then you should read a suitable textbook.

The brain can be very roughly divided into three sections: the lower, middle and upper. At the lowest level are the activities which govern the blood pressure, the depth and rate of breathing, the body temperature, the digestive process and so forth. There are also many automatic or reflex centres in the spinal cord which carry out many body functions that have no need to be controlled from the brain itself.

The midbrain acts like an intricate switch-board. It receives impulses from every part of the body, sorts them out and transmits relevant impulses to the higher brain centres. It acts like a sluice gate that prevents unnecessary information going to the higher centres. It is the guardian of the gate, which only allows certain data to pass through. It thereby prevents the upper brain being overwhelmed by irrelevant information.

The upper or higher section of the brain is called the *cerebral cortex*. It is this part of the brain that structurally distinguishes man from animals. Fish and birds have little or no cerebral tissue; chimpanzees have the largest cerebral cortex of all animals; while man has easily the largest of all earthbound creatures.

The cerebral cortex fills the dome of the head and is divided down the middle; each half is automatically separated from the other. Each half is cross connected with nerves so that one side controls the other side of the body – the left side of the cerebral cortex controlling the right side of the body, and the right side of the cortex controlling the left side of the body. In most people the functions of the left hemisphere of the cortex are dominant; it is associated with speech, hearing and analytical undertakings such as mathematical problem solving. The right hemisphere is primarily concerned with spatial perception, synthesis of ideas and appreciation of art and music. The two hemispheres are connected together through a bundle of nerve fibres called the *corpus callosum*.

The cerebral cortex includes the centres that receive incoming data from the body via the midbrain and interpret them in a sensible manner. These centres decipher all external data coming from the surroundings through the sense organs of the eyes, ears, etc. All incoming information is interpreted by comparison with previous memories and from this suitable conclusions are reached. Appropriate actions are then instigated and carried out by the body. The cells and centres of the cerebral cortex act as receivers and transmitters of thought. They are the junction at which the mind-brain liaison takes place.

The brain is composed of two main types of tissue; one is called grey matter and the other white matter. The grey matter consists of nerve cells and the white matter of nerve fibres

(lengths of nerve cells joined together). Unlike most other types of cells within the body, nerve cells do not regenerate or reproduce themselves. It is believed that each person is born with a full complement of these nerve cells to last the entire lifetime. They grow during childhood, but they do not multiply. If the cells die then the fibres will also die and vice versa. The nerve fibres connect the different cells together within the brain and also connect the brain to all parts of the body. They may be as long as fifty centimetres in length. It has been estimated that there are about two hundred million incoming and outgoing fibres linking the brain with the rest of the body.

The following is a brief description of the major functional areas of the brain.

The *cerebellum* is a fist-sized region located at the rear and lower part of the brain behind the top of the spine. It is concerned with maintaining muscular tone throughout the whole body. It supplies a continuous stream of nerve impulses to the motor nerves and thereby keeps the muscles in the appropriate state of partial contraction. The cerebellum also coordinates the movements of the muscles and harmonizes complex muscular actions. The entire process occurs automatically.

The *thalamus* is located at the top of the spine in the middle of the brain. It is the relay or transmitting station that sends information to the higher centres of the brain, having sorted out unwanted data. It is also the region where so-called protopathic sensations reach the threshold of conscious perception. The protopathic sensations are the instinctive signals which indicate pain, pleasure, etc. in different parts of the body without any discrimination regarding their importance, meaning, etc. Other more sensitive sensations are called epicritic; these are consciously perceived in the cerebral cortex, having passed through the thalamus.

The *hypothalamus* at the top of the spine is connected directly to the thalamus; it is part of the limbic system and is concerned with our emotional states and reactions. It is the centre that makes the emotional response of happiness, unhappiness, anger, etc. It is often inhibited by the higher brain centres, so that one suppresses emotional reactions. The reward (pleasure) and punishment (pain) areas of the brain are also located within the

hypothalamus. It is interesting to note that the pleasure centre is appreciably larger than the pain centre. The hypothalamus is also the central control centre of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous outflows. These two systems are associated with control and activation of all the organs of the body, from the heart to the eyes, from the skin to respiration.

The hypothalamus also contains the centre of wakefulness, consisting of sympathetic nerves, and the centre of sleep, consisting of parasympathetic nerves. The hypothalamus is therefore a very important part of the brain.

Other parts of the brain include the *fissure of Roland*, *parietal lobe* and the *occipital lobe*, where most of the functions concerned with skin sensations such as touch, temperature and pressure; hearing, seeing, eye movements, sense of smell and taste, speech and so forth are received and interpreted.

The most well-known area of the brain is called the *frontal lobe*, located behind the forehead. It is this centre that most clearly differentiates man from animals. It is this area that is concerned with human traits such as truth, honesty, morality, justice, discretion, friendship and many other characteristic human attributes. This is the so-called silent area of the brain which determines the nature of an individual. Any injury or malfunction of this area can cause the individual to become careless, mentally deranged, depressed, anxious, or lose all sense of values. It is the centre of personality. It is also believed to be the instrument or centre which picks up the memory of the mind; this is demonstrated by the fact that electrical or nervous stimulation of this area brings about recall of past experiences, good and bad. This part of the brain acts as the switchboard of the mind.

Nervous system

The nervous system is an extension of the brain, though the brain can also be considered to be part of the nervous system – it is a matter of definition. The brain communicates with the rest of the body through the nerves of the spine and a multitude of others outside the spine. The brain is like the telephone exchange and the nerves are like the thousands of telephone lines that connect the telephone exchange to individual telephones. Innumerable messages

pass to and from the brain, bringing all organs, muscles and all parts of the body into direct communication with the brain. Most of these messages occur below the level of conscious perception.

There are two main groups of nerves. One group is the sensory nerves which transmit information to the brain concerning the state and happenings in the outside environment and about the physical condition of the body, such as temperature, pain, etc. Each type of sensory perception requires a special receptor. The sensations connected with pain, pleasure and touch of objects depend on specific sensors; these cannot detect other sensations. There are thousands of these different sensors throughout the whole body. Nerve impulses from these detectors travel to the brain along specific nerve pathways; from there they are redirected to the particular brain centre connected with that type of sense. They are then interpreted according to previous experience.

The second group of nerves are called motor nerves. These come into play if action is required in response to the interpretation of nerve impulses from the sensory nerves. The motor nerves carry explicit commands from the brain to the muscles telling them to move in a certain manner. Let us give an example. You are reading a book. Your eyes are attracted to something interesting. Sensory information is transmitted to the brain. The brain responds by sending a series of messages to the muscles of the fingers, hands and arms, directing them to turn the pages of the book for more information. The sensory and motor nerves act as a continuous feedback system.

This same feedback operates with the nerves of taste and smell located in the mouth and nose. If we taste some food, we immediately know whether we like it or not. The taste buds on the tongue are sensory receptors that immediately flash a message to the brain; from this we know whether to continue eating or not. The pleasant odour of a well-cooked meal acts in the same way. Both of these sensations not only allow one to enjoy food, they also cause the digestive organs to prepare for the process of digestion.

It is the nervous system that allows the brain to receive information from the eyes. Within each eye there are millions of small receptors that are sensitive to light; they detect all

the different colours. When the eyes look at something, then a picture or image is formed on these sensors in the screen (retina) at the back of the eye. These sensors transmit messages to the brain where they are interpreted. In this way, one understands the nature of the object.

It is the same with the ears; they contain thousands of tiny sensory nerves that are sensitive to differences of pitch, tone and quality of sound. All the different sounds that occur at any one moment are transmitted to the brain, where they are interpreted and recognized as being a sound that has been heard before. If it is a pleasant sound such as beautiful music, it will produce a joyful emotional response. Without the brain we would never be able to recognize any sounds.

A most important section of the nervous system is the autonomic nervous system, comprising the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves. They are essential for maintaining perfect balance and harmony in the functioning of all physical organs².

It should be abundantly clear that without the brain and the nervous system, we would be totally unable to experience the outside world; also the functioning of the inner organs would not be synchronized so that they work together for the overall health and wellbeing of the entire body. The degree to which we can live to the full depends on the efficiency of the brain. Various yogic practices, especially *sirshasana*, help the brain to function as a perfect instrument.

Endocrinal system

The endocrinal glands supplement the nervous system, in particular the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves. Together, they make up a single neuroendocrine system that integrates and coordinates the metabolic activities of the body, and controls the ability of the body to face changes in the internal and external conditions. The two systems work hand in hand. However, the important difference between them is that the nervous reactions are quick and short lived, whereas endocrinal responses are slow and protracted to give permanent changes to the body. That is, the nervous system produces speedy changes in the body, while the endocrinal system gives continuity to these changes.

The glands are distributed throughout the body and secrete specific chemicals called hormones into the bloodstream. In this way, the hormones are distributed to all parts of the body. These trigger definite organs that react to specific hormones. In this manner changes are induced within the body according to the dictates of the brain, which is also the master controller of the endocrinal system.

The glands do not work independently – each gland reacts with and modifies the influence of the other glands. Thus any disorder of the endocrinal system in general or in one of the glands alone can have negative repercussions on the health of the whole body. Yoga practices in general help to harmonize the entire system and render individual glands efficient.

The main glands in the endocrinal system are the pituitary, pineal, thyroid, parathyroids, adrenals, ovaries and testes. It is the two glands in the brain, the pituitary and the pineal, that we are interested in briefly describing here for it is these two glands that are influenced directly by sirshasana. The other glands are also influenced, but less directly.

Pineal gland

A very interesting, yet little understood gland is the *pineal gland*. The function of this gland is not certain and baffled medical scientists are still trying to unravel its secrets. It is located in the centre of the brain, and is pea-sized. Many people have regarded it as an organ that has lost its purpose in the evolutionary growth of man. That is, that it had a use when man was in a more primitive state. However, this is most unlikely, since it has an extremely high blood flow. Per unit weight, it has the second largest blood flow of all the organs in the body, being second only to the kidneys. This suggests that it has a most important functional duty, which has not yet become obvious to scientists. In time, its secrets will be revealed. Though its physiological role cannot be definitely ascertained, it is regarded as an endocrinal gland.

In yoga and other mystical systems throughout the world, the pineal is regarded as the physical equivalent of the third eye – the intuitive eye of revelatory knowledge. It is the eye of illumination. It is the physical organ that focuses knowledge or experience of more subtle realms of being into the brain

for comprehension by the individual. It is analogous to a transistorized valve of a radio which picks up the electromagnetic waves from a far-off broadcasting station. This is not really a very good analogy, but it indicates what we are trying to convey. The pineal gland is the organ in the brain through which the individual can experience the more subtle levels of experience. It is also associated with the ajna chakra, the psychic centre that is concerned with psychic powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance, etc. It is through the pineal gland that psychic signals or phenomena are channelled into the brain and the body. It is the physical organ, associated with the more subtle ajna chakra, by which two individuals can communicate in a more subtle and direct manner.

Perfect functioning of the pineal is most important in yoga and can be brought about by sirshasana as well as other yogic techniques, which improve its large blood requirements and harmonize its relationship with the rest of the body and brain.

Pituitary gland

The pituitary is the master controller of the endocrinal system, though it is in turn controlled by the brain via the hypothalamus. It is a small pea-sized gland located near the top of the spine in the brain. It only weighs half a gram, but it exercises a vast influence on all the processes of the body. It regulates the production and secretion of the hormones produced by the glands. Without the sensitive control of the pituitary, the hormonal secretion of the other glands would create havoc in the body.

The pituitary gland produces a number of different hormones in small quantities. Some of these act directly on the body, but most of them trigger the functions of the other glands. In this way, the pituitary has widespread influences on almost everything that occurs within the body.

Somatotrophic hormone (STH) promotes body growth and the ability to resist disease. Without this substance, we would easily die from even the mildest infection, for it mobilizes the white blood cells and antibodies to protect the body.

Adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) directs and mobilizes the function of the adrenal glands. When the brain receives sensory nerve

impulses from the outside world which require quick or emergency response from the body, it stimulates the sympathetic nervous system and the pituitary, which in turn activates the adrenal glands; the adrenal glands secrete adrenalin which prepares the whole body for rapid reactions and actions. The entire process occurs very rapidly. ACTH also stimulates the secretion of other important hormones in the adrenal glands, including the glucocorticoids which act on the metabolism of food, and on the sex hormones.

The pituitary secretes a hormone called *thyrotrophin* which activates and controls the functioning of the thyroid gland. The thyroid performs a multitude of functions and if it is not functioning correctly then the whole body suffers drastically³.

Pituitrin (also called *pitressin*) is concerned with the reabsorption of water in the kidneys and raising blood pressure.

Various sex hormones are secreted directly from the pituitary. The most important are the *follicle stimulating hormone* (FSH) and the *luteinizing hormone* (LH). FSH acts upon the follicle, the structure in the ovary in which the female egg develops. It causes rapid maturation of many follicles, so that the ovary enlarges to accommodate them. FSH also stimulates the hormone *estrogen* (estrin) which prepares the womb for growth of a baby (embryo). In men, FSH stimulates the production of sperm (spermatogenesis). Luteinizing hormone is associated with the monthly cycle of women. It also stimulates the production of another female hormone called *progesterone* (progestin) which is also concerned with preparing the body for the growth of a baby. In males, LH stimulates the production of the male sex hormone *testosterone*, which specifically produces male characteristics in the body, such as hair growth, powerful muscles, deep voice and so forth. The pituitary also produces various other sex hormones, such as *lactogen* and *pitocin* which have other specific duties to perform.

The pituitary secretes a hormone called *diabetogenic hormone*, which has a direct influence on the liver and the production of insulin in the pancreas. This hormone is very important with regard to the understanding of diabetes. It is usually believed that the cause of diabetes is malfunctioning of the islets of Langerhans, the cells in the pancreas that

secrete the hormone insulin. Because of this, the standard method of combating diabetes is to take a daily dosage of insulin. This does allow the diabetic to live a reasonably normal life, but it does not take into account the cause of the lack of secretion of insulin. Modern research is showing that the prime cause of diabetes is chronic mental stress which, among other things, interferes with the normal secretion of diabetogenic hormone from the pituitary. This explains why the pancreas of a diabetic is often found to be in good condition and no different from the pancreas of a healthy person. Yoga practices, including *sirshasana*, act directly to harmonize the functioning of the pituitary and to bring its relationship with the brain into balance. This helps to cure diabetes by encouraging the correct secretion of diabetogenic hormone from the pituitary gland.

There are many other hormones secreted by the pituitary gland, too many to discuss in this brief resume. The main purpose of this description is to indicate how vital the pituitary gland is in maintaining perfect health and functioning of the body. If it malfunctions then the whole body will suffer. Even if it works inefficiently, then there will be a tendency for the body to become unhealthy and for the individual to lose vitality. *Sirshasana* acts directly on the pituitary gland by improving its blood supply, and also the blood supply to its controller, the brain. It is for this reason that *sirshasana* can harmonize the entire endocrinal system and the multitude of functions that it carries out.

Blood supply to the brain

The human brain requires an enormous amount of oxygen which is transported to the brain via the blood system. To continuously supply large amounts of oxygen the blood flow to the brain has to be correspondingly large. The brain weight is only 2% of the total body weight, yet it requires about 20% of the total blood supply coming from the heart to keep it in good condition. This also implies that 20% of the oxygen taken into the body by the lungs goes to the brain. This huge supply is necessary in order to meet the demand of the highly active neurons.

There is little storage of oxygen in the brain. Therefore, if nerves are totally deprived of

blood for more than a few seconds, then they cease to function. If this continues for about five minutes then the nerves will die. This can lead to severe disturbance of the neurological functions. If the impoverished nerves can obtain enough oxygen from nearby blood vessels, they may be able to function for some hours or days, and eventually regain their working capacity. If the entire blood supply to the brain is stopped, then one will become unconscious in less than ten seconds. These facts clearly indicate the importance of an adequate blood supply to the brain and how sirshasana helps by supplementing the brain with an enriched blood supply.

Let us give a few more interesting facts. The average blood flow to the brain is about 750 millilitres per minute (according to *Human Neuroanatomy* by R. Truex and M. Carpenter). This perhaps does not sound very much, but if you do a short calculation you will find that this amounts to approximately 1080 litres per day, which is a lot of blood.

The number of blood vessels in the brain is colossal. Most of them are so thin that they can only be seen under a microscope. It is said that the total length of the blood vessels in the brain is more than 50,000 miles (though there are various other differing estimates). Can you imagine this length? It is twice the distance around the world at the equator. Perhaps now you are beginning to appreciate the density and complexity of the blood system of the brain, and how vital the blood supply is for perfect health and functioning. In certain regions of the brain, the network of blood vessels is so dense and the capillaries so fine that some penetrate between enmeshed individual nerve cells and some even pierce them (remember that the individual cells are very small, there being billions in the brain). This system of nerve cells and blood vessels must be nourished by a constant flow of fresh, oxygenated blood. If this nourishment does not reach the brain cells then brain power and efficiency will diminish.

General summary

We have spent a lot of time describing the prime organs and functions of the brain. There is much more that could be said, but this would require hundreds more pages. What we have tried to do is to show and emphasize that

everything we do in life is totally dependent on perfect functional efficiency of all parts of the brain.

There are various factors that can interfere with healthy operation of the brain. The three main factors are:

1. chronic mental stress and conflict
2. insufficient respiration
3. bad blood supply

Let us discuss these points in turn

Excessive mental and emotional stress sustained for long periods of time tend to disrupt the whole brain and nervous system. The nervous system and brain is flooded with disharmonious nerve impulses placing the brain and nervous system under heavy pressure. In fact, we often say that a person who is tense has frayed nerves. This prolonged stress can eventually cause one or more of the bodily organs to break down under the strain. For example, excessive mental tension and frustration can make the heart beat too fast and raise the blood pressure; or the stomach secrete too much acid, resulting in ulcers; or put the endocrinal system under so much strain that one of its organs fails to perform its duties correctly as in the case of diabetes. The root cause of these illnesses is the mind, which in turn adversely influences the brain and the body.

Most people know that mental and emotional stress can lead to illness; but merely knowing this fact will not prevent the occurrence. There has to be positive steps. One of the best steps is to start practising yoga. This will help to calm the mind and bring about a state of mental harmony, which in turn will allow the brain to perform its duties unimpeded resulting in overall good health. The yogic practices can be meditation techniques, pranayama, relaxation methods and asanas. Among the asanas, sirshasana is one of the most useful for inducing mental peace and equanimity, and thereby bringing balance into the brain and physical body.

Malfunctioning and inefficiency of the brain can also arise from two more obvious sources – inadequate blood supply and lack of oxygen. These two factors are directly related with each other. Bad breathing can actually starve the body, including the brain, of oxygen. The health of the brain and body must decline under this condition. Inadequate breathing

is often done by people who do little exercise and who don't breathe deeply. Methods of overcoming this problem include the practices of pranayama and asanas. Sirshasana, once again, is a useful asana because it automatically induces slow and deep breathing in the final pose. Also, in the final position of sirshasana, the brain receives an abundant supply of oxygen due to the direct and downward flow of blood from the heart.

An inverted asana, such as sirshasana, is the most direct method of rectifying inadequate blood flow to the brain.

If the brain is not receiving enough blood, then a simple solution is to turn the body upside down for a few minutes every day. During this period, the whole system of the body and the brain can be toned up for the day. In this way, impurities will be removed from the brain and purified blood circulated to all the neurons. The benefits will be retained even when you return to the standing position again. The many benefits of sirshasana make it worthwhile including it in your daily practice program¹.

Notes

¹ Topic 4 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

³ For further details on the thyroid gland refer to Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

The Chakras (Part 3)

Much is said about the evolution of consciousness as the chakras are awakened. This is incorrect. Consciousness cannot be evolved; it is ever existent. When the chakras are awakened, then the limiting factors of the mind, called *maya*, are slowly removed so that consciousness shines through more and more in its pristine glory. There is no evolution of consciousness when the chakras are opened up – there is an increase of awareness associated with purification of the mind. The term unfoldment of awareness or expansion of awareness is better than evolution of consciousness. But let us leave the treacherous world of semantics before we become tied up in too many knots. In this concluding topic on the chakras we want to ‘tie up a few loose ends’.

Tabulation of chakra characteristics

There are a large number of traditional characteristics associated with the chakras. On the accompanying two charts we have listed some of these characteristics, omitting those that are less relevant for the sake of clarity. Some of the characteristics have already been discussed. The following are ones that perhaps need a little explanation.

Lokas: These are ‘levels of awareness’ or ‘spheres of being’. They can be very roughly defined as follows:

- *Bhu* – earthly, material
- *Bhuvah* – intermediate
- *Swahah* – subtle maha – the abode of devas (divine beings)
- *Janah* – the abode of those who have transcended the ego
- *Tapah* – abode of enlightened siddhas (perfect beings)
- *Satyam* – truth

These lokas correspond exactly to the chakras and their meaning is the same. Each level indicates progressively higher heavens.

These different planes or spheres are also symbolized by the *sri yantra* (sometimes called

sri chakra)². If you look carefully, you will see that the central point is surrounded by a series of rings, one within the other. The largest ring, or the outer framework, is called the *bhupura* and represents the mooladhara chakra or the *bhu loka*. The other inner rings correspond to the other chakras and lokas.

Koshas: These are called ‘sheaths’ in English. They are five in number, and they indicate the five bodies of man, progressing from the gross physical to the subtle blissful sheath. They roughly correspond with the chakras as we have indicated.

Tattwas: These are unfortunately translated as ‘elements’ in English which tends to cause confusion, for the tattwas are incorrectly associated with the elements of science or the aspects of nature as fire, water, earth, etc. The tattwas indicate something much deeper and more subtle. For example, the earth tattwa is related to the mooladhara chakra. It does not mean earth of the variety in the garden; it means the specific frequency range of pranic vibration associated with the mooladhara chakra and which corresponds to the mind-body as a whole, including one’s thoughts and awareness.

Likewise, water is associated with the swadhisthana chakra. Again this water tattwa does not mean the water that you drink, but that level of vibration or sensitivity that is higher than the earth tattwa and which corresponds to the swadhisthana chakra.

The same applies to the tattwas of the other chakras. They represent progressive refinement in one’s being.

Bija mantras: These can be translated as ‘seed sounds’. They are the specific mantras or sounds that correspond to the chakras. In a rough sense, they represent the resonant frequency of the chakras, though they imply much more.

We have only very briefly described these various aspects; to give a full exposition would

Chart 1: Chakra Characteristics

Chakra	Ascending order	Physical location	Lotus symbol	Lingam symbol	Granthi (psychic knot)	Guna (quality)
Mooladhara	1	perineum	four petals deep red	swayambhu	brahma	tamas
Swadhisthana	2	coccyx	six petals vermillion	—	—	tamas
Manipura	3	navel	ten petals bright yellow	—	—	rajas
Anahata	4	heart	twelve petals blue	bana	vishnu	rajas
Vishuddhi	5	throat	sixteen petals violet	—	—	sattwa
Ajna	6	top of spine	two petals silver-blue	itara	rudra	sattwa
<i>end of chakra realm</i>						
Bindu	—	back of head	—	—	—	—
Sahasrara	7	crown of head	one thousand petals all colours	para or jyotir	—	—

Chart 2: Chakra Characteristics

Chakra	Loka (level of awareness)	Kosha (sheath)	Tattwa (element)	Bija mantra (seed mantra)	Musical note	
					Indian	Western
Mooladhara	bhu	annamaya (physical)	prithvi (earth)	lam (लं)	sa (स)	do
Swadhisthana	bhuvah	annamaya (physical)	apas (water)	vam (वं)	re (रे)	re
Manipura	swahah	annamaya (physical)	tejas (fire)	ram (रं)	ga (ग)	mi
Anahata	maha	pranayama (etheric)	vayu (air)	yam (यं)	ma (म)	fa
Vishuddhi	janah	pranamaya (etheric)	akasha (ether)	ham (हं)	pa (प)	so
Ajna	tapah	manomaya (mental) & vijñanamaya (intuitive)	—	aum (ॐ)	dha (ध)	la
<i>end of chakra realm</i>						
Bindu	—	—	—	—	ni (नि)	ti
Sahasrara	satyam	anandamaya (blissful)	—	—	sa (स)	do

require an entire book. We have introduced them to open your eyes to close correlations between these characteristics and the chakras. We want to show that these different concepts are not isolated; they are all part of a whole, and are really talking about the same thing in different terms.

The necessity of gradual awakening

In the yogic paths such as karma yoga, bhakti yoga or jnana yoga the chakras are only opened up when the time is right. That is, the chakras awaken only when the individual has reached a certain degree of mental equanimity. This is generally such a smooth process that the chakras are not felt when they manifest. In the methods of kundalini yoga the awakening can be much faster. Because of this, great care has to be taken.

If there is too much force, or excessive willpower, then the chakras can open prematurely. They can open before the mind of the individual is sufficiently harmonized. This can cause severe mental disturbances, for the individual can be suddenly confronted with the most negative aspects of his subconscious mind. Possibly illness, physical and/or mental can result. One may become very angry and then very happy within a short space of time. One moment there may be optimism, the next moment pessimism. This occurs in the lower chakras.

But don't worry: premature awakening is very rare because it requires very strong willpower and unceasing practice (though the chakras can also be prematurely opened by other methods, such as drugs). For most people the chakras are gradually opened over a period of time.

This confrontation with one's deeper mental problems is absolutely necessary for those on the spiritual path who want to awaken the chakras and the potential of the mind. Sometimes it can be a little unpleasant, but it is the process whereby the mind is purged of all accumulated suppressions and neuroses. All the mental blocks, problems and conditioning are recognized and removed so that the mind becomes a progressively more refined instrument. But the process should be slow so that there is gradual adjustment between one's inner realization and the relationships with the outer world.

In summary premature awakening of the chakras, that is, premature ascent of the kundalini, can cause great unhappiness because one is suddenly confronted with the negative samskaras (mental impressions) that have not been worked out and neutralized. Imbalance of the body and mind can easily result. Though this is a rare occurrence we strongly advise you not to use excessive force or to be in too much of a hurry. The way is to aspire, to practise, but not to be impatient and expect instant results. Let things take their natural course through your diligent efforts.

The remodelling of the mind-body

The awakening of the kundalini, the awakening of the chakras, must be slow since the whole mind-body complex has to be gradually remodelled to take and withstand the new surge of power and pranic activity associated with expanded states of awareness. A common analogy given to illustrate this point is a light bulb and its electricity supply. Most people have a body that is comparable to a low or zero watt light bulb. Through yoga practices the flow of prana in the body increases. This brings states of illumination, but simultaneously the wattage of the light bulb – the strength and purity of the mind-body – has to be increased to withstand this extra flow of prana. If the electric power is too high for a bulb, then the bulb will blow. In the same way, if the prana flow is too great in the body-mind, then injury can easily arise. Therefore, we again emphasize that progress in tantra-yoga must be slow. Don't expect instant results. Let the body be gradually reformed in accordance with the ascent of the kundalini. Give the body time to open up and create new pranic pathways to channel the greater flow of prana. And this is an amazing process; as awareness expands and the kundalini rises, so the incredible intelligence of the pranic body constructs new pathways (nadis) in the same way that the River Ganges creates new channels and gullies during the flood season. This process must occur, but it takes time. Don't be in a hurry. Progress slowly but surely. This is important.

General summary

We have just about exhausted the subject of the chakras and the kundalini. The most important thing is to awaken them. This is

the purpose of kriya yoga. Until we begin to introduce the actual kriya yoga techniques in Book III, we suggest that you practise the techniques that we are giving regularly and sincerely to locate the chakra points. This will ensure that you are fully prepared to gain the most out of the system of kriya yoga.

Notes

¹ The Chakras: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 1;
Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 6

Manipura Chakra

Manipura chakra is the third of the ascending chakras, mooladhara being the first and swadhisthana the second¹. The manipura is a most important centre and is widely mentioned in traditional scriptures. In Buddhism, it is regarded as the seat of the kundalini, although in reality the kundalini can be regarded as residing in all chakras. Tantra yoga regards spiritual life, or expansion of awareness, as starting at the level of the mooladhara chakra, for it is here that man begins to become aware of himself, even if in a very rudimentary form. Therefore, the kundalini is said to reside at the mooladhara chakra level. Buddhism, on the other hand, regards expansion of awareness as beginning at the manipura chakra, the lower chakras being considered as instinctive levels of man, and therefore the kundalini is considered to reside at the manipura chakra. In this context, the abode of the kundalini is a matter of definition.

The manipura chakra is indeed the centre of prana within the human framework; it is the centre of the incredibly complex network of subtle energy that permeates and controls the body from behind the scenes. It is the centre that puts man directly in contact with the subtle forces of the cosmos. In this sense the kundalini can be regarded as residing in manipura. The Buddhist concept is perfectly correct. However, the mooladhara chakra is also a vital trigger centre that is very much concerned with directing pranic forces from the base of the spine upwards through sushumna to the higher centres. It is often associated with transmutation of sexual energy into more subtle pranic energy (ojas). Both of these chakras are centres of pranic energy but in a slightly different sense. It is for this reason that the Buddhist and tantra-yoga systems seem to differ. They adopt a particular aspect of the pranic energy in man and regard it as the power of the kundalini. The kundalini is actually the sum total of the dormant potential

in man. Each of the chakra centres can be used to put man directly in contact with the pranic substratum of his being and to raise levels of awareness. Therefore, both Buddhist and tantra-yoga concepts are correct.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *mani* means 'gem' or 'jewel'; the word *pur* means 'city'. Therefore, the word *manipura* can be translated directly as 'the city of gems'. It is so called because of the intensity of the pranic energy at this centre. In the *Gautamiya Tantra* it says: "The manipura chakra is so called because it is lustrous like a sparkling jewel." (ch. 34) It is often compared to the dazzling power of the sun, which continually radiates energy to the planets. Without the sun there would be no life on this earth. In the same manner, the manipura chakra radiates and distributes pranic energy throughout the entire human framework; without this chakra, each person would be lifeless and totally devoid of vitality. It is also compared to a blazing fire, since it burns up and assimilates the energy in food in the same way that a fire burns up wood and releases the inherent energy. The absorption of energy in the human structure takes place at different levels – at grosser levels by absorbing the nutrients of food for the upkeep of the physical body and at a more subtle level by absorbing the more subtle essence of food to refuel the pranic body. The manipura is intimately related to this entire process at all levels.

This centre is also widely called the *nabhi chakra* – the navel chakra.

Attributes

This is the chakra level where people become very active and extroverted. They involve themselves with many external activities whether in work or play. Many people in the world are functioning at this level. They try to impose their will on other people and the



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Manipura

world around them. It is the centre where all things and other people are seen as a means to providing personal power and satisfying worldly ambitions.

The manipura is the centre of dynamism and energy. People at this level are predominantly rajasic (active and intense) in nature; the lower chakras, mooladhara and swadhisthana, are predominantly tamasic (lethargic and negative) in nature.

At the level of the manipura chakra people seriously begin to question their attitude towards life and their place in the scheme of existence. This is in accordance with the Buddhist concept that the kundalini resides in manipura. Until the level of manipura, people are not knowingly on the path to expansion of the mind.

Symbolism

The accompanying diagram of the manipura chakra speaks for itself. It is visualized as a bright yellow lotus with ten petals. On many traditional tantra-yoga diagrams the Sanskrit letters डं (dam), धं (dham), नं (nam), तं (tam), थं (tham), दं (dam), धं (dham), नं (nam), पं (pam) and फं (pham) are written on the petals. We have omitted these. In the centre of the lotus is a blazing sun representing the heat and energy of the chakra. Surrounding the sun is a red triangle in which is contained the seed (bija) mantra रं (ram). Little more needs to be said; in fact, any prolonged explanation will confuse more than clarify. Furthermore, intellectual explanations tend to create preconceptions without corresponding experience, which easily becomes a mental block.

Location

The physical trigger point of the manipura chakra is in the middle of the spine directly behind the navel. For the purposes of location in the early stages, it is worthwhile placing one finger on the navel and then placing a finger of the other hand on the corresponding location on the back at the same horizontal level. With the eyes open, adjust the position of the finger at the back and then press it firmly into the spine. Then feel the sensation of that exact point of pressure. In time, this will enable you to feel the precise position of the trigger point in the spine with the eyes closed.

Manipura kshetram

In kriya yoga practices, the area of the body directly in front of the manipura chakra area on the front surface of the body is also used as a point of awareness. This is called the *manipura kshetram* and is exactly located at the navel. You should develop the ability to locate this region. Most people should find it quite easy to feel and locate the manipura kshetram with the eyes closed.

MANIPURA CHAKRA LOCATION

Two excellent methods of locating the manipura chakra trigger point and the manipura kshetram are called *uddiyana bandha* and *manipura shuddhi*. These are practised as follows.

Stage 1: Uddiyana Bandha

Those who have been practising the pranayama lessons regularly according to the instructions that we have given will be fully familiar with this bandha². For the purposes of locating the manipura chakra and kshetram the technique is as follows:

Sit in a comfortable position, preferably one of the traditional meditative asanas, with the knees flat on the ground³.

Perform uddiyana bandha.

Be aware of the navel.

Practise a number of rounds for about 5 minutes.

Then stop uddiyana bandha.

Fix your attention on the blood pulse at the navel. You should distinctly feel it.

After a few minutes, transfer your attention to the manipura chakra trigger point in the spine; if necessary you can physically locate this region with your finger as described under the previous heading 'Location'.

Try to feel the blood pulse at this point.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

Then if you have time, again do a few more rounds of uddiyana bandha.

Then again be attentive to the blood pulse at the manipura kshetram and chakra for a few minutes each.

Repeat the entire process again if you have time. Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: Manipura Shuddhi

The Sanskrit word *shuddhi* means 'purification'. Therefore, this technique can be called the

‘manipura purification’ in English. The method is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Hold the back straight. Keep the eyes closed.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Feel the contraction and expansion of the navel as you breathe in and out.

Feel as though you are breathing in and out at the navel (manipura kshetram).

Fix your whole attention at the navel.

Feel that the breath is being drawn from the manipura chakra trigger point in the spine through the navel and outwards as the abdomen expands during inhalation.

Feel that the breath is being pushed inwards through the navel to the manipura chakra in the spine as the abdomen contracts with exhalation.

Be attentive to this rhythmical process.

Continue in this manner for at least 10 minutes.

Then combine the mantra Aum with the inhalation and exhalation of breath.

You should still continue to feel the movement of breath inwards and outwards, but it must be now synchronized with Aum.

Feel the breath and mantra piercing the navel (manipura kshetram) and the manipura chakra in the spine.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available. Be attentive.

Practice note

Try to practise the two techniques that we have described every day until fully mastered, and before proceeding to the next stage. If you don't have sufficient time available try to do at least one of them every day.

In this lesson we have described ajapa stage 2⁴. Try to integrate this practice with the location of the manipura kshetram. That is, at the end of exhalation feel the manipura kshetram being pierced, and feel the breath being pulled upwards from the manipura kshetram during inhalation.

Notes

¹ Mooladhara chakra – Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2; Swadhisthana chakra – Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3

² Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁴ Topic 5 of this lesson

Asanas: Sirshasana (Part 1)

The most well known asana must be the headstand pose – *sirshasana*. Even those people who have no contact with yogic aims and practices have heard of this asana. They have the prevalent concept of a yogi in a loincloth standing on his head for many hours everyday, with his bed of nails beside him on which to relax afterwards. This concept usually comes from the favourite cartoon portrayal of the yogi in this position. Recently, in fact, we saw a cartoon in which a most unlikely looking man was standing on his head while studying a book. When his wife asked him what he was doing, the man replied: “I have heard that the headstand improves memory, so I’m studying for my exams in this position.” In one of our ashrams overseas the milkman places the milk bottles upside down on the doorstep every morning. He explained to the resident swami that he did it after having seen a cartoon about a milkman who did this when he delivered milk to a man who practised yoga. So *sirshasana* is inseparably associated with yoga.

Though there are a lot of exaggerations connected with *sirshasana* it is nevertheless a wonderful asana. It can give many benefits if it is done correctly. If it is done incorrectly, or by the wrong people, it can cause more harm than good. It is sometimes called the king or the best of all asanas. This is a slight overestimation for all asanas have their place. *Sirshasana* alone is not sufficient to give perfect health. Although it will help very much it has to be supplemented by other asanas that have specific influences on other parts of the body. It is a combination of asanas and daily practise that brings overall good health; it is not one asana no matter how good it may be.

We intend to describe all aspects of *sirshasana* in two parts¹, which is necessary for two reasons: firstly, *sirshasana* and all associated details will require a lengthy description; secondly, it is an asana which should be gradually developed and mastered. All asanas

should be slowly developed, but this is especially true of *sirshasana*. If you try to master *sirshasana* too quickly, then there is the likelihood of a fall from the final pose and injury to the body. Also the body must be gradually accustomed to the extra burden of prolonged durations in the inverted position; failure to do this could lead to harmful effects on the bodily system. We are therefore presenting *sirshasana* in two parts, which means that you, the practitioner, will be more likely to spend the necessary time preparing your body for the final pose by practising and perfecting the initial stages given in this topic. There will be less chance of anyone vaulting or catapulting themselves into the final position like an acrobat and falling flat on his back.

SIRSHASANA (HEADSTAND POSE) – PART 1

The Sanskrit word *sirsha* means ‘head’. Therefore, this asana can be translated as the ‘headstand pose’.

Strange though it may seem, *sirshasana* is not mentioned or described in any of the well-known yoga scriptures. Considering the benefits that it gives, this seems at first a little surprising. But more than likely the asana was passed on from guru to disciple by word of mouth and personal tuition. In this way, there was less likelihood of *sirshasana* being practised incorrectly and thereby causing harm. It is only in recent years that *sirshasana* has been fully explained in books and become widely popular with large numbers of people.

Possibly the following quotation from the *Gheranda Samhita* describes *sirshasana* under a different name: “The solar region is located in the navel and the lunar region is located at the root of the palate. Nectar drops downwards from the lunar region to the solar region and is absorbed; so do men die. Hold the navel upwards and the lunar region downwards.

This is called vipareeta karani mudra, secret of the tantras. The head should be placed on the ground together with the arms. Point the legs upwards, keeping the head firmly on the ground. This is vipareeta karani mudra according to the yogis.” (verses 3:28, 29, 30)

There is a similar quotation in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. There is in fact a well-known mudra called vipareeta karani mudra, which is an important part of kriya yoga². But far more is implied in the practice than given in the above quotation. The above description is so vague that it could actually apply to and fit sirshasana, sarvangasana³, and any other inverted asanas, as well as the practice of vipareeta karani mudra as we know and understand it. It is possible that sirshasana was known by a different name and that it, as well as other inverted asanas, were collectively known by the name of vipareeta karani mudra, sirshasana being a modern name. We don't however, intend to discuss this point further, for it is only supposition and certainly not very important. The main thing is the practise of sirshasana and the benefits that it gives.

Place of practice

Sirshasana should be practised in an uncluttered area, free of furniture and any other objects. This is necessary, so that if you fall you will be able to land correctly on your feet and not sustain injury. If you fall and land on top of a nearby chair, for example, then you are likely to break a few bones, or at least strain the body in some way. So make sure that the area in which you practise is perfectly clear of obstructions for at least two and a quarter metres in all directions.

The ground should be smooth, flat and firm. Don't practise on sandy or rocky ground, on any slippery surface, or on any surface that is not horizontal.

The support of a wall

Beginners can if they wish practise near a wall, especially if they are unsure of themselves. In this case, it is important that the back of the head is placed a little more than thirty centimetres from the wall in the starting position. This is important because if you place your head nearer to the wall, then the wall will prevent you raising your body into the final pose. On the other hand, if you place your

head further away from the wall, then you may fall against the wall and injure yourself; instead of being an aid, the wall will become an obstruction.

The wall is to be used only to prevent any backward overbalance; it should not be used to perform the asana in anyway. When you gain confidence and proficiency we recommend that you discard the wall and practise in the middle of an open space. This will further help to develop your sense of confidence.

Method of falling

Before starting to practise sirshasana you should make sure that you know how to fall properly, especially if you practise away from a wall. This is not being pessimistic; it is a worthwhile precaution. It is better to be safe than sorry, as the well-known saying goes. We don't expect you to fall, but it can happen even to those people who have been practising sirshasana for years.

If you fall the body should be relaxed; don't stiffen the body. You must allow the body to fall like a sack. If you fall forwards, that is, the same direction as your face, then you should fold the knees into the chest as much as possible. The impact on the floor should be sustained by the feet only. If you fall backwards, that is, behind the head, then the back should be arched as much as possible. The impact again should be sustained by the feet. No part of the back should hit the floor before the feet.

Blanket

More than any other asana, sirshasana should be practised on a blanket, mat or thin cushion. It should be neither too soft nor too hard; neither too thick nor too thin. The blanket should be such that it protects the top of the head from the hardness of the floor, but not so spongy, soft and thick that it prevents one taking a firm base on the hands and head. We recommend that you practise on a blanket that is folded four times.

Correct position of the head

There are conflicting opinions on this subject. Some people say that the forehead must rest on the floor, while others say that the top (crown) of the head should rest on the floor. If one supports the weight of the body on the forehead, then the spine will be curved in

the final pose, especially in the region of the neck. If the weight of the body is supported by the top of the head then there is a tendency for the body to be unstable in the final pose. From our experience we have found that the best position of the head is midway between these two extremes. That is, the head should be placed so that a point midway between forehead and the top of the head rests on the blanket. You must experiment for yourself to find this position. If you feel comfortable with the forehead or crown of the head on the floor, then practise in this way.

Position of the hands and arms

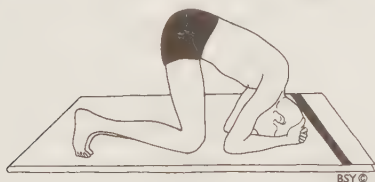
The fingers of the hands should be interlocked behind the back of the head. The hands should be wrapped around the head; they should not be placed under the head. The hands should be adjusted so that they firmly support the head.

The forearms and elbows of both arms should lie flat on the floor. The distance between the elbows should be the same as the distance between the elbow and interlocked fingers of each hand (at the back of the head). Thus the forearms will form two sides of an equilateral triangle, the distance between the two elbows forming the other side. This is the most stable base that supports the body in all directions.

TECHNIQUE

The first three stages

The first three stages should be perfected before proceeding to the last three stages¹. This is essential so that you gradually develop control over your body and accustom the muscles and brain to a new mode of operation.



Stage 1: starting position

Place your blanket on the ground.

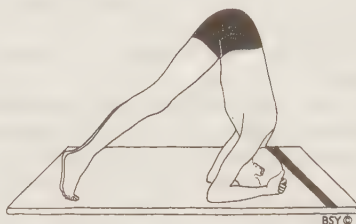
Kneel in front of the blanket with the feet together or apart.

Interlock the fingers.

Place the forearms flat on the blanket so that they form an equilateral triangle, the distance between the two elbows being equal to the distance between each elbow and the palm of the hand.

Lean forwards so that the head rests on the blanket just in front of the clasped hands, the area of the head halfway between the forehead and the crown should rest on the blanket.

Wrap the interlocked hands around the back of the head and adjust them so that they firmly support the head. Remember that the hands act as a framework for the head, they should not act as a cushion.



Stage 2: straightening the legs

Make sure that the starting position is comfortable and firm.

Straighten the legs so that the body is supported on the head, two arms and the toes of both feet.

Slowly bring the toes nearer to the face; this will progressively make the back move towards the vertical position.

At a certain stage, it becomes impossible to move the feet nearer the face with the legs straight, without pushing and overbalancing the trunk backwards.

This is the final position as shown.

Most of the weight of the body is supported by the head in this position.

Adjust your position so that you feel comfortable then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: raising the feet

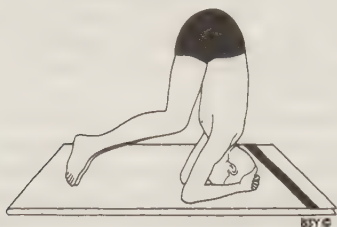
Keeping the trunk vertical, slowly bend the legs.

Bring the thighs as close as possible towards the chest.

Make sure that you don't overbalance.

This stage may be a little difficult if you have a stiff body; don't proceed beyond this point until you can comfortably bring the

thighs close to the trunk without the slightest tendency to topple backwards.



The last part of stage 3 is difficult unless the trunk is as vertical as possible with the centre of gravity as far back as possible; therefore try to position your trunk so that it is as vertical as possible, but without losing balance and falling backwards.

Transfer all the body weight on to the arms and head.

Try to raise one foot, then both feet together about twenty centimetres or so off the ground, maintaining balance.

This is the movement that most beginners find difficult.

Usually this difficulty arises because of the inability to make the trunk vertical, which prevents the feet being raised without toppling forwards or backwards.

With time and practice, it will become easier.

If you feel stable then raise your two feet a little higher, again establishing the balance of the body.

If you feel any instability, then let the feet drop lightly onto the floor, and repeat the process.

Don't let the body overbalance backwards; it is preferable to let the body overbalance forwards. If you are not sure of yourself then practise near a wall.

This stage is not really difficult, but it may require a little time and practice.

Don't raise your feet more than, say fifteen centimetres off the ground until you are absolutely confident that you can raise them higher while maintaining balance. Then proceed to stage 4¹.

Warning

Don't swing your legs upwards in stage 3; this is the quickest way to overbalance and land flat on your back. Do every movement smoothly and with control, by contracting the back muscles and slowly readjusting the

position of balance (centre of gravity) as you raise your legs.

Suggestion

We suggest that you practise these first three stages until you gain the correct balance and confidence to proceed to the last three stages of sirshasana¹. This may take anything from a week to a month, or even longer. Progress carefully and don't strain yourself. Don't practise if you have any serious ailment, and be sure not to practise immediately after taking food.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 3

² Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 2)

Ajapa japa is a method of exploring the deeper realms of the mind and eliminating mental problems. In the initial stages the mantra functions on the surface level of your mind, but in time and with regular practice it will permeate and plummet into the deeper subconscious realms. It is then that you will start to come face to face with your deep-rooted fears, worries, desires and neuroses. All these negative aspects of your mind come to the surface or rather they come within the range of your conscious perception.

Sometimes these aspects of your mind can explode very quickly. You may become a little unhappy for some time, but if you persevere then these problems will be neutralized and you will emerge on the other side with a more harmonized and contented mind. Try to continue the practice no matter how much negative dross arises; only stop the practice if it stirs up too much of the murky aspects of the mind, too quickly. In this case, you can recontinue the practice at a later date.

In the process of cleaning out the mind it is a good idea to combine ajapa with chidakasha dharana¹. In this case, you will see the subconscious contents of the mind in the form of images on the mind screen (chidakasha) in front of the closed eyes. These will be like dreams, but you will be fully conscious of them. These will be images of your deeper problems. In Sanskrit they are called samskaras (mental impressions) and vasanas (deep-rooted desires). Don't suppress these images or react to them. You must merely be aware of them and watch them with an attitude of an unconcerned witness. You must feel as though they are something separate from your being. In this way, these samskaras will be exhausted and the mind will be relieved of much tension and anxiety. This will take time and practice, but is essential in making the mind a perfect instrument.

Basic features of ajapa

As a reminder, the following are the important points of ajapa.

1. Deep and rhythmical breathing
2. Continuous awareness of the breathing
3. Continuous repetition of mantra synchronized with breath
4. Relaxation of mind and body
5. Comfortable sitting position
6. Practice of ujjayi pranayama²
7. Practice of khechari mudra².

If you can carry out all these features then you will make great progress.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 2

Technique

In stage 1 of ajapa japa you synchronized *So* with the incoming breath and *Ham* with the outgoing breath³. In stage 2 the process is very similar, but each breath will start with exhalation with the mantra *Ham* and end with inhalation with the mantra *So*. The mantra *Ham* is still associated with exhalation and *So* with inhalation (as in stage 1) but now the mantra will be *Hamso* instead of *Soham*. There should be no pause between *Ham* and *So* but a slight pause after one round of *Hamso*. This may seem a fine difference compared to stage 1, but it is nevertheless important.

Relaxation of the mind and body is essential before starting the practice. To achieve this you can do a series of asanas and pranayama and/or you can chant *Aum* a number of times. Adopt any suitable method.

As a means to become aware of the contents of your subconscious mind, you should periodically stop ajapa and do chidakasha dharana for a short duration. The method of stage 2 is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Perform the same preliminary relaxation procedures as described for stage 1³.

Chant *Aum* a number of times, say 13 times.

Then do khechari mudra and ujjayi pranayama².

Become aware of the breathing process for a short time making it deeper and slower.

Try to feel as though you are the process of breathing itself.

Then imagine the breath moving between the navel and throat.

Inhalation upwards from navel to the throat.

Exhalation downwards from the throat to the navel.

Be attentive to the rhythmic flow of breath. Don't force; just be attentive to the natural process of breathing.

Watch the breathing become slower and slower. If you find it difficult to imagine the up and down flow of breath, you can imagine that there is a glass tube connecting your navel to the throat.

The tube contains water.

As you breathe out the level of water drops from the throat to the navel.

Continue this practice for at least 5 minutes.

Then synchronize the mantra *Hamso* with the breathing. With exhalation downwards from the throat to the navel hear the sound *Ham*.

With inhalation upwards from the navel to the throat, hear the sound *So*.

Thus with each round of respiration you will hear *Hamso Hamso Hamso* and so forth.

There will be continuation between exhalation and inhalation, but a slight break between inhalation and exhalation.

Be sure to maintain awareness of the breath and the mantra.

After some time, say 5 minutes, leave ajapa and become aware of the space in front of the closed eyes. Watch any images that arise with an attitude of detachment; these are the contents of the subconscious mind.

Continue this for a few minutes.

Then return to the practice of ajapa with mantra and breath awareness.

After about 5 minutes, again observe the space in front of the closed eyes.

After a short time return to ajapa.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

Period of practice

This second stage of ajapa should be practised every day until the synchronization of the breath and the mantra occur without any

effort. Then you are ready to progress to stage 3⁴.

General

In this lesson we have described practices to locate the manipura kshetram located at the navel. This is the lowest junction of the movement of breath during ajapa. Try to clearly feel the exhaled and downward flowing breath penetrating the navel (manipura kshetram) and being drawn upwards from the same centre during inhalation. This will greatly help to develop your sensitivity to the exact position of this centre in preparation for kriya yoga.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5

⁴ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced the manipura chakra together with practices for locating its trigger point in the spine, and for locating the manipura kshetram. We advise you to practise it regularly in order to develop sensitivity. Don't neglect techniques concerned with the mooladhara and swadhisthana chakras that we have discussed in the previous two lessons.

You should now proceed to ajapa stage 2, having learnt stage 1. Feel the breath and mantra piercing the manipura kshetram on the lower extremity of movement.

Slowly master the first three stages of sirshasana if you are able. Don't try to proceed

beyond these three stages – mastery of this asana has to be slowly developed. If you have some ailment that is contraindicated for sirshasana, please don't attempt the asana without prior expert guidance.

Continue to practise pranayama in the manner described, according to your ability.¹ We don't want you to harm yourself – it is for this reason that we are giving you a long period to master this practice. Actually, the practices of pranayama don't need much describing; they require prolonged practice. It is only in this way that one will reap the benefits.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Janu Sirshasana or	
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Yoga Mudrasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	4
Sirshasana – stages 1, 2, 3	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	15
Mooladhara and Swadhisthana	
chakra location	15
Manipura chakra location	20
Ajapa Japa – Stage 2	19
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shalabhasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Janu Sirshasana or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana or Supta Vajrasana	4
Sirshasana: stages 1, 2, 3	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	4
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
Mooladhara and Swadhisthana chakra location	10
Manipura chakra location	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 2	14
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Janu Sirshasana or Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana – Stages 1, 2, 3	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
Manipura chakra location	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 2	10
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health
benefits

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Janu Sirshasana or	
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana – Stages 1, 2, 3	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama	10
	30

Try to find the time to practise Manipura chakra location and Ajapa Japa. This is important for kriya yoga.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 4

Lesson 22

If the pingala nadi is flowing during meditative practices then one will experience events that are concerned with the outside world. If the ida nadi is flowing then a state of mind will arise called laya, a state of unconsciousness or total absorption in thought processes. When the sushumna is flowing during meditative practices then one is more likely to experience those planes which are real, which are pure, which are on the path to real knowledge. Therefore, if you want success in your meditation practices make sure that the sushumna is flowing.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

The Balance of Life (Part 1)

In this topic we will bring in many seemingly unrelated subjects. Yet, as you will see by the end, they are all intimately connected. Everything which we will discuss has the greatest relevance to the unfolding of your potential, whether physical, mental, psychic or beyond. We want to integrate and harmonize the opposing principles contained in the following concepts:

1. Ida and pingala
2. Flow of the left and right nostril
3. Introversion and extroversion
4. Knowledge and action (jnana and karma)
5. Meditation practices and external work
6. Prana and consciousness
7. Shiva and Shakti

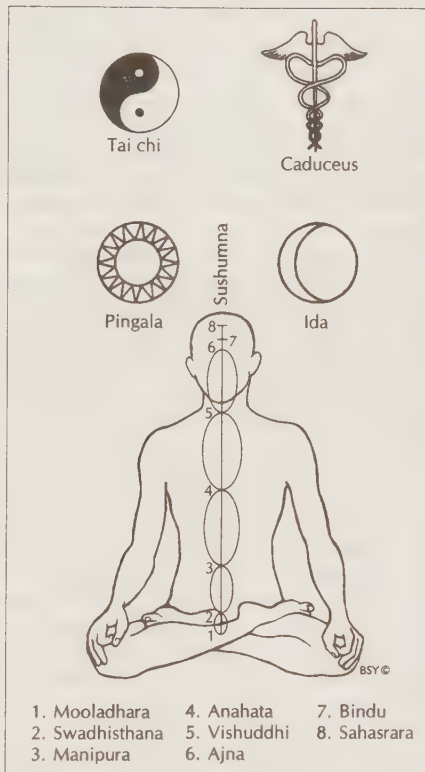
All these subjects may appear to be totally unrelated, but as we will show, they all constitute parts of a whole. If you understand them correctly, they will clearly show you the path which you must tread to spiritual awakening. If you misunderstand them, then it is possible that you will take the wrong path and either stay at lower levels of awareness or descend from a higher to a lower one. Many people have done this and are still doing it.

The central theme of this discussion is *ida* and *pingala*. These two principles were conceived and symbolized by the sages of the past. These wise men understood ida and pingala, the two currents of human aspiration, through personal experience. They clearly saw that the concepts of ida and pingala applied to all levels of being, from the grossest to the most subtle. The concept spans the apparent chasm between the physical and the spiritual.

Let us discuss the implications of ida and pingala at the different levels of meaning.

Symbolism of the ida and pingala

The ida and pingala are called nadis (the Sanskrit word *nadi* means 'flow'). In this context, the flow can be physical, nervous, psychic, mental and that of awareness. Under-



standing of ida and pingala is usually confined to the physical, nervous and pranic (bioplasmic) aspects within the human framework.

Though there is nothing wrong with this limited viewpoint, it is nevertheless a gross oversimplification which misses much of what the ancient yogis were trying to tell us. The ida and pingala mean much more than is widely known. In this chapter we want to give a brief description of all the different levels of meaning behind the symbolism of the ida and pingala.

The two nadis are depicted entwined about the spine or central axis, criss-crossing each

other at the chakras¹. Ida and pingala begin at the same point: the mooladhara chakra of the perineum (see diagram).

The mooladhara chakra corresponds to the stage of human development where awareness begins to unfold². From this chakra the pingala makes a semicircular curve upwards on the right side of the spine. It crosses the spine again at the swadhisthana chakra and proceeds on a similar curved path on the left side of the spine, until it crosses the spine again at the manipura chakra. In the same manner, pingala continues upwards, crossing the spine in turn at the anahata and vishuddhi chakras until it reaches and ends at the ajna chakra at the top of the spine in the middle of the head. This is clearly illustrated on the accompanying diagram.

The ida path follows a similar path as the pingala but in the opposite sense. They are reflections of each other. That is, as the pingala crosses to the right of the spine, ida crosses to the left and vice versa. The important thing to remember is that they cross each other in turn at each of the chakras, as illustrated.

The central axis of ida and pingala is the sushumna nadi³. This nadi portrays the path of the mystics, the path of yoga that treads the narrow razor's edge between the path of ida and the path of pingala. It is depicted as rising straight upwards through the centre of the spine, meeting ida and pingala at the points where they cross at the chakras. The sushumna starts at the mooladhara chakra and passes through all the chakras in turn. Eventually it terminates in sahasrara – the absolute oneness. This is the realm, or non-realm, of *nirvana* or *kaivalya* (onlyness). It is within the sushumna that the kundalini rises, the progressive ascent of knowledge associated with higher states of awareness as the chakras are opened up. All these terms have already been discussed.

The three paths are also known as *ganga* (ida), *yamuna* (pingala) and *saraswati* (sushumna) after rivers in India, the last being a mythological junction where the two other rivers actually join in Prayag, Allahabad. The ida and pingala indicate time, while the sushumna is the devourer of time, since it leads to the timeless or eternity.

The ida and pingala have many meanings. The following list indicates a few of these characteristics.

Ida	Pingala
breath flow through left nostril	breath flow through right nostril
parasympathetic nervous system	sympathetic nervous system
introversion	extroversion
awareness	energy and action
mind	prana
moon	sun
subjectivity	objectivity
white	red
tha	ha
negative	positive
coolness	heat
inactive	active
yin	yang
female	male

There are many more possible characteristics that could be listed. On the spiritual path, it is the integration and harmony of opposites at all levels that is important. The aim is to combine the opposites associated with duality so that they perfectly merge. This is the meaning of the sushumna. It indicates balance and fusion of the opposite principles of ida and pingala. To illustrate this, we will take a few examples from the list we have already given:

Ida	Sushumna	Pingala
tha	hatha	ha
coolness	temperateness	heat
subjectivity	absolute	objectivity
yin	tao	yang
inaction	actionless action	action

In spiritual life all mutual opposites must be balanced as one progressively expands awareness. This is symbolized by the crossing of ida and pingala at the chakras. The chakras represent the progressively higher levels of awareness.

Physical implications

The ida and pingala operate on the physical level. Ida corresponds to the flow of breath through the left nostril, and pingala to the flow through the right nostril. These two flows of breath in turn are directly associated with the functioning of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, which regulate and maintain equilibrium of the different

functions of the body. They are antagonistic; if one predominates, the other is subordinate. One system tends to conserve energy while the other tends to expend it; one system tends to prepare the body for external action, while the other tends to rest the body and direct energy to internal processes. In general, the sympathetic nervous system speeds up the processes of life, such as the heartbeat, the breathing rate and raises body temperature. The parasympathetic nervous system, on the other hand, slows them down, conserving the body's reserve energy. They function night and day, governing the output of the heart, the blood pressure and the speed at which the body's organs operate. Most of these functions are carried out automatically; because of this, we are rarely aware of the activity of these two vital counterbalancing systems.

The flow of breath through the left nostril tends to stimulate all the physical organs and nerves associated with the parasympathetic nervous outflow; the flow of breath through the right nostril stimulates organs and nerves of the sympathetic nervous outflow.

This diagram illustrates only the main nerve connections. There are many more, as well as numerous interconnections between the different nerve pathways. If you are interested in looking deeper into this subject, we recommend you consult a textbook on physiology.

To clarify the diagram, the following list shows how stimulation of the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerve outflows affect the different organs.

The following chart is an oversimplification, but it illustrates that the sympathetic system tends to mobilize the forces of the body for external action while the parasympathetic system tends to mobilize the forces for internal functioning. *Ida* is the parasympathetic outflow; *pingala* is the sympathetic.

The functions associated with the sympathetic nervous system tend to come into play when the breath flows predominantly through the right nostril. Conversely, all the functions associated with the parasympathetic nervous system tend to come into operation when the breath flows predominantly through the left nostril. At any time in the day, the flow in

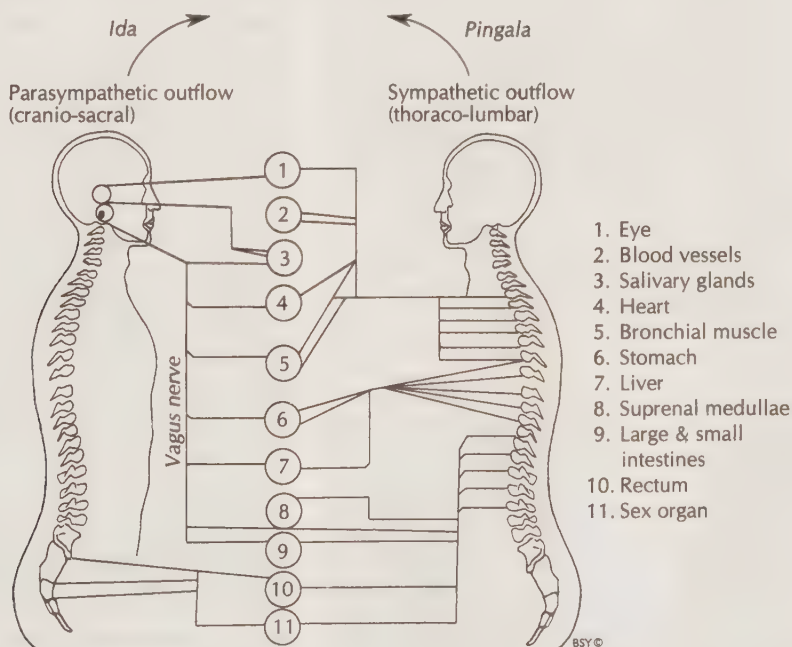


Chart 3: Sympathetic and Parasympathetic Outflows

Organ	Sympathetic Outflow	Parasympathetic Outflow
eye	<i>Stimulation gives:</i> dilation of pupil	<i>Stimulation gives:</i> constriction of pupil
blood vessels of head	constriction (increases brain efficiency)	—
salivary glands	—	secretion of saliva (digestion)
heart	rate quickens	rate slows
bronchial	relaxation	constriction
muscles	air intake increases	air intake reduces
stomach wall	relaxation (digestion stops)	contraction (digestion begins)
liver	mobilization of glycogen (for sudden energy needs)	—
suprarenal medullae	secretion of adrenalin (to face emergencies)	—
small intestinal walls	relaxation (tends to stop digestion)	peristaltic contraction (stimulates digestion)
large intestine (colon)	relaxation (prevents bowl evacuation)	peristaltic contraction (empties bowels)
rectum	constriction (stops emptying of bowels)	peristalsis (emptying of bowels)
sex organs	constriction of blood vessels	dilation of blood vessels

one nostril is usually greater than that in the other. If you like, you can test this for yourself. This predominance also alternates gradually during the day, so that after some time the other nostril will have the greater flow of air.

There are many factors which determine which nostril will have the greater air flow. These include:

- Mental and emotional states
- Activity, whether physical, mental or strenuous
- Influence of moon, sun, planets, stars, etc.
- Time of day
- Climatic conditions (temperature, humidity, etc.)
- Illness

The number of factors is vast. The air will flow spontaneously according to the combined interaction of these factors. The study of these factors is called *swara yoga* (the yoga of rhythms).

The predominance of air flowing in either nostril determines whether the operation of the sympathetic or parasympathetic system is more dominant. There are also times when the flow of air in each nostril is the same. This occurs when this predominance of flow is changing from one nostril to the other. At

this time there is perfect balance between the two nervous systems and a condition of physical equanimity. The ida and pingala are balanced at a physical level. But this also leads to a degree of mental and emotional balance in the individual because the mind is intimately related to the physical body. They are part of a total interrelated system. Therefore, balance of the two flows of the ida and pingala in the physical body also implies a tendency towards mental and emotional harmony. This time of perfect balance is the ideal time for meditation practices. In yoga, this balance can be purposely induced through asanas, pranayama and other techniques⁴.

We have briefly described how the ida and pingala function within the physical body. This is only one level of functioning. The ida and pingala are not to be identified only with the sympathetic and parasympathetic systems. The ida and pingala have meanings at other levels as we will now explain.

Psychic implications

The ida and pingala principles also apply at the pranic and mental levels of being. They

represent the two distinct forces within the human environment. In a sense, they represent the positive and negative aspects – the ebb and flow of human existence. They do not represent two specific psychic passages as is often understood, but rather the total pranic and mental currents. Ida represents the mind and pingala represents the pranic body.

The Chinese, thousands of years ago, developed the concept of *yin* and *yang*. These two principles correspond exactly to the ida and pingala principles. The Chinese also developed the healing system of acupuncture based on the flow of prana within the body. Modern researchers in Russia have photographed these pranic flows, calling the energy bioplasma. This energy is also used in the science of psychic healing (sometimes called spiritual healing). In all these cases it is the pingala aspect of man's psychic being that is being used . . . that is prana.

The mind corresponds to the ida aspect of man's psychic realm. It is within this ida aspect that man can develop the so-called supernatural powers such as clairaudience, clairvoyance, telepathy, etc. These powers are merely a part of the vast potential that lies within the grasp of each human being. The negative repercussions of prematurely unfolding and using these powers for selfish ends will be discussed later.

It should be remembered that the mental and pranic forces in man, the ida and the pingala on a psychic level, are inextricably interrelated. The mind has direct repercussions and influence on prana and vice versa. It is only for convenience of explanation that this division is made; don't take it too literally or seriously. This also applies at other levels. Try to regard all aspects of man, physical, pranic and mental, as being inseparably joined and fused to form a whole unit. Try not to become caught in the net of misconceptions by considering that these aspects are watertight, independent departments.

The pingala is associated with action, while the ida is associated with thought. This tendency towards a predominance of thought or action is related to the predominant flow of breath in the left or right nostril, in the same manner that the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems are intimately related to the same flows.

In the duration of the twenty-four hour day, there should be an overall balance between the two flows of ida and pingala. That is, the flow through the ida should predominate for about twelve hours, and the pingala also for about twelve hours. Remember, this does not mean that one flow will predominate for a single stretch of twelve hours, but that the total time is twelve hours, composed of smaller durations. If these intervals are equal, then it means that there is a balance between thought and action, between extroversion and introversion⁵.

During daylight hours, the pingala generally predominates. This certainly applies to people who have to use a lot of physical exertion in their occupation; but it also applies to people who do a lot of mental work, for thought has to be translated into external action. Of course, ida will also flow, but it will tend to be subordinate to the pingala flow. Work generally implies dealing with other people and outside events; pingala will therefore tend to predominate during the daytime.

In order to maintain balance of the ida and the pingala, ida will tend to predominate during sleep at night, which counteracts the predominant pingala flow during the daytime.

It is also worthwhile pointing out one reason why people who practise yoga tend to need less sleep. Whereas the average person is totally absorbed in his or her work, the sincere yoga practitioner tends to do everything with a greater sense of detachment; that is, he maintains an attitude of introversion even during strenuous work, maintaining a greater balance between introversion and extroversion throughout the day. This implies greater balance between ida and pingala. Other people need more sleep to compensate for the greater flow of pingala during the daytime. Of course, even great yogis tend to need some sleep because there is always some imbalance. In addition, there are many other factors (moon, sun, climate, etc.) which affect the ida and pingala flows.

If one is excessively worried about work (or any other external preoccupations), and if one is pushing the body beyond its limits, then pingala will tend to predominantly flow day and night. If this imbalance continues over a long period of time then the entire physical and pranic body will become disharmonized.

The result will be illness. This is the situation of large numbers of people in the modern competitive world; they are too active and tense. This is one of the reasons for the prevalence of diseases such as cancer.

On the other hand, a person who broods a great deal, who continually dwells on his problems and who does little work or has little outside interests will have a predominance of ida. He also will suffer eventually, whether from lack of physical exercise, or mental problems such as neurosis.

Thus balance between the ida and pingala is essential. There must be equilibrium between introversion and extroversion. When this is not the case, the human system eventually takes steps to compensate this imbalance. This is manifested in illness, fatigue, depression or whatever. This is a natural law; if you break this law of the body then you must pay the penalty. If you feel tired, then rest; if you feel active then work or play hard. Try to follow the natural rhythm of your body and mind. It is when the body is pushed too hard, because of ambition, fears, desires or whatever, that imbalance occurs. Listen to your body and mind and follow its laws. This is not easy, but through the practise of yoga it becomes progressively easier.

There are a large number of factors which influence the physical, pranic and mental aspects of man, both in the internal and external environment. Any generality that is made about these factors has a tendency to be inadequate. To attribute the predominance of the ida flow or the pingala flow to any one specific cause is also totally inadequate. One has to understand the totality of a situation to obtain a true picture. This requires a high level of intuitive understanding and is the reason why so few people follow the path of swara yoga. We have given no specific details on the factors that determine the dominance of flow in the ida and pingala; we wish merely to indicate the general principles involved and their basic meaning and implications.

Spiritual implications

We have explained the basic meaning of ida and pingala in terms of the physical body, pranic body and the mind. In all cases, you will notice there is the suggestion of a passive and a dynamic mode – an inward looking and

outward looking principle. In the physical sense, the passive, inward directed mode is ida in the form of the parasympathetic nervous system, the internalizing forces of the body; this is counterbalanced by pingala in the form of the dynamic, outward looking aspect of the sympathetic nervous system. In the psychic realms, ida corresponds to the mind and mental forces of man, and pingala corresponds to the pranic or bioplasmic body. In a much wider and all embracing sense the pingala corresponds to universal prana, shakti or the energy of manifestation and the ida with awareness. This is clearly indicated in many scriptures such as the Upanishads and Tantras. The physical, pranic and mental aspects are included and encompassed by this higher definition. This universal prana is *prakriti* – the power behind all manifestation, force, energy and matter. Awareness is the witnessing principle, the actionless aspect that is associated with consciousness, *Shiva* or *purusha*. This wider, more comprehensive definition of ida and pingala has vast implications and significance on the spiritual path as we will shortly explain.

We have already said that the ida and pingala are depicted diagrammatically as crossing each other at the ascending chakras. This has a most important meaning for the spiritual aspirant. It means that as one opens up the potential of the mind there should always be a balance between inner awareness and action, inner knowledge and external expression in the world. If one of these aspects predominates then there is imbalance. This is why spiritual awakening should be slow and progressive, to allow one's actions to match one's level of inner understanding, one's expression and relationships in the outside world to match and balance the inner expansion.

As one becomes more and more aware, so one's actions must be modified accordingly. In this sense, the chakras represent something like a stage of rest where one recuperates and balances action with understanding. Failure to do this leads either to a block to further progress, or a fall. This is to be the main subject of the rest of this discussion.

At the level of the ajna chakra ida and pingala merge and become one. This is very symbolic. It represents the stage where the differences between prana and consciousness are broken down. They are seen to be one and

the same thing. The principle of ida merges with the principle of pingala to become one.

The deeper significance of hatha yoga

Hatha yoga is the best known of the yogic paths because it is the yoga that deals directly with the physical body. It is therefore a path that everyone can relate to and see an obvious reason for practising, but this is, once again, a gross oversimplification. Hatha yoga has far more implications than physical fitness alone.

Hatha is composed of the two syllables *ha* and *tha*. The syllable *ha* means 'the sun' and *tha* means 'the moon'. Therefore, hatha yoga is concerned with attaining harmony between the sun and moon aspects of our being. The moon implies ida nadi which is often called the *chandra nadi* (chandra – moon). The sun represents the pingala nadi, which is often called the *surya nadi* (surya – sun). Hatha yoga is intimately concerned with everything that we have so far discussed in this topic – the balance between ida and pingala. Remember that ida and pingala have many levels of meaning as we have tried to show under previous headings. Hatha yoga is concerned with balancing the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. It is concerned with balancing flows in the psychic realms of being; with balancing the tendency of mental introversion and extroversion. In the highest sense, it is concerned with balancing and harmonizing inner awareness with external expression and relationships and of inaction with action. Hatha yoga is concerned with balance at all these different levels of being, making it an elevated path of practice, with far more implications than are usually attributed to it. Keep this in mind the next time you practise hatha yoga.

The path of ida

This is the path of mental unfoldment, when one becomes aware of the inner potential of the mind. If one is totally concerned with this path, then there is a tendency to unleash mental (psychic) powers, which are often used for selfish ends.

Many of the scriptures clearly state that concern only with this path of ida can eventually lead to a block on the spiritual path, and can even lead to a downfall. Many occult schools, operating without a competent guru, follow this path. They develop psychic powers amid

an atmosphere of selfishness. Inner awareness is developed, but there is always a limit. Many people who are concerned only with this path develop neuroses and psychoses because they confront their inner seed problems (samskaras) too quickly and too suddenly. They don't allow the samskaras to be exhausted through interaction with the outer world through work etc. This is also generally the case with drugs. They open up inner psychic awareness too quickly and can cause many (though not all) people to be suddenly overwhelmed by their inner complexes, phobias, etc. There is also a tendency for many drug users to become concerned only with personal experiences and pleasure. This is the path of ida. This one-sided development eventually becomes an obstacle to further unfolding of one's potential on the spiritual path. Drugs used under the guidance of a competent master are something totally different. In this case, the master will take care to guide his disciple along both the ida and pingala paths, so leading to spiritual awakening.

Hitler, and other black magicians, and in fact numerous people throughout the world were on this path of ida and many are now treading it. They unlock psychic powers for selfish reasons, using these powers to harm others. This is called black magic. Any person who misuses these powers pays the penalty; they reap their own punishment – eventual loss of their powers.

We should point out that knowledge of the inner world is part of the spiritual path, an essential part. But over concern with exploring the inner world to the exclusion of all else can be a block. It can lead to a certain stage after which there will be no progress. One will either find that one's efforts to explore the mind will lead to states of unconsciousness (laya) or one will be tempted to misapply one's knowledge, depending on the individual and the degree of success in exploring the mind. We urge you not to tread this ida path to the exclusion of all else. Balance it with pingala, the path of external expression. It is only in this way that you can work out and remove your problems and selfish motives and attitudes towards others. It is only in this manner that you can gradually develop understanding, love and positive relationships with other people and the world in general.

The path of pingala

This is the path that most people in the world are now following – the pravritti marga – the path of external action and enjoyment. It is the path of trying to attain knowledge through understanding of the outside world. Little significance is attached to understanding the inner world. It is the path where one acts in the world mostly for personal gain and one's own welfare. One tries to manipulate other people and the immediate environment for one's own satisfaction and motives. This may be done blatantly, subtly, innocently, unconsciously, even insidiously, craftily or whatever, but always there is a personal motive. Total concern with the outside world, the path of pingala alone, is an obstacle on the spiritual path.

Before a person can seriously start to tread the spiritual path, however, it is usually necessary to be completely immersed in the pingala path of external activity. From experiences in the world, from exhaustion of ambitions, from gaining satisfaction through the attainment of personal aims and finding that they give little increase in happiness, will come a stage where one starts to question one's relationship with life, asking questions such as: What am I? Where am I going? What is this life all about? What right have I to consider myself as being more important than others? Is this life really functioning according to the law of the jungle? and so forth. Of course, there are very few people who don't ask these questions. But generally they are quickly forgotten in the rush to satisfy one's needs, in the rush to become more successful than one's neighbour and in so many other activities that keep people busy twenty-four hours a day, whether in physical action, thought or dreams. Only when one reaches a certain stage do these questions about life start to have some intensity. When these questions are asked seriously then a person will take positive steps to find answers. At this point aspiration really begins. This is the start of spiritual awakening where the pingala path is supplemented by the ida path. One begins to combine outer activities with inner awareness.

Ida and pingala paths are usually depicted as starting from the mooladhara chakra. But with respect to spiritual life, it is probably truer to say that pingala extends into the lower

chakras, the chakras associated with instinctive life in man, animals and lower life forms. The ida, however, does start at mooladhara, for it is here that individual awareness starts to unfold. Below mooladhara there is no awareness, but external actions do exist. Therefore, pingala really has a nebulous beginning below mooladhara where life functions in its most primitive, basic and simple forms. This is only a concept but worth noting and remembering.

Integration of ida and pingala

The main purpose of this topic is to emphasize the importance of integrating and balancing the ida and pingala. By combining both paths, one's potential is unfolded in a balanced manner. Inner potential and awareness are expanded with a corresponding change in the actions and relationships with the external environment. This combination leads to a progressive effacement of ego-centred motives and identification, which in turn leads to the rising of the kundalini through the chakras. One's power and knowledge are increased according to the expansion of awareness. The word kundalini does not mean mere power; it means power and potential combined with awareness, understanding and a sense of identification with other people. This understanding is necessary so that one acts for the good of others as well as oneself – for the overall good of everything. The kundalini rises up sushumna, the middle path, the balance between ida and pingala. It rises in accordance with the level of ego effacement. This occurs for a short duration during intense meditation practices or more permanently through a total harmonization of one's life at all levels.

At the ajna chakra, ida and pingala join and also end. This implies that after this point, the barriers and differences between the inner and the outer realms of existence are broken down. They combine to become one harmonious whole. This is symbolized by the sahasrara and is nirvana.

The integration of ida and pingala is profoundly important. It is impossible to make progress on the spiritual path beyond a certain point unless one slowly erases the power of the ego. This is done by harmonizing inner life with outer life. This will not happen overnight. It must be progressive and spontaneous. The distinctive characteristic feature of a great

yogi or a saint is a lack of ego. They have not achieved their illumination while maintaining a strong sense of individual ego. One cannot exist with the other in the same way that total darkness cannot exist at the same time as total daylight. But don't worry if you are very egotistical. Accept the situation. You are not alone. But if you have aspirations to tread the spiritual path then question all your ego motives. You need not stop acting egotistically, merely know that your actions are self-centred. This in itself will slowly help to reduce ego-centred actions and thoughts. It will not remove the ego, but it will help to reduce it. The ego must exist at all stages of spiritual life until the culmination has been attained.

The best way to progressively reduce the power of the ego is to combine the ida and pingala paths; integrate your duties and work in the world with meditation practices. This will help you to gain understanding of the inner world. The knowledge that you gain of the inner world will automatically reduce your egotistical tendencies in the outside world, and your new relationships with the external world will in turn help you to go deeper into the realms of the inner being. The ego will be slowly whittled away.

In spiritual life it is essential to balance inner awareness with external expression. Ida must be in balance with pingala.

Selfishness and selflessness

Selfishness and selflessness are mutually exclusive. Where there is one, there cannot be the other. If a person is selfish in an action or thought, then he cannot also be selfless. One leads to awakening of human potential while the other prevents it. Selfishness is an obstacle, while selflessness is a necessity. But of course, selfishness cannot be wiped out instantaneously; it takes time. This is the purpose of yoga practices (sadhana). As you expand awareness and change your attitudes correspondingly in the outside world, then your ego motives will gradually reduce.

This is directly related to the ida and pingala. If you concentrate too much on ida (introversion) then your ego will not reduce. You will make little headway in realizing your potential beyond a certain point. If you are totally involved in the outside world, without any inner awareness, then again there will be

no drastic changes in your ego-centredness. This is the case with most people. In the first case, people tend to be absorbed in getting 'high' on psychic experiences, which eventually leads to self-centredness. In the second case, people tend not to have the incentive to change their ego-centred attitude to others, even if they recognize them in the first place. It is only when the ida and pingala are balanced that there is a reasonable balance between inner unfoldment and outer expression; it is here that the ego identification becomes less.

This balanced attitude towards life is very important, and is clearly stated in the scriptures. Christ said: "Look within", but he did not mean people to lose themselves in psychic adventures. He said look inside but also "Love thy neighbour" and "Love thy enemy". This important point is often missed or forgotten. The Mahayana Buddhist system emphasizes that you should not seek nirvana (liberation) for your own benefit. You should seek nirvana for the sake of other people. This is embodied in the ideal of the *Bodhisattva*. It is very easy to miss the significance of this idea. The Mahayana Buddhists say that a person should not be satisfied until he has gained liberation of all other beings. Of course, this is rather an impossible task, and is not really intended to be taken literally. The purpose of this ideal is to indicate that spiritual awakening should not be and cannot be egotistical. It cannot be a personal thing; it is not possible. The spiritual path does not mean that you only unfold your own nature and potential; it means that you simultaneously understand and tune in with the nature of others.

The implications of the sayings of Christ and the precepts of Mahayana Buddhism are that one should have aspiration for awakening one's potential, but that one should not become lost in continual thoughts of personal self-development and progress. There has to be a balance between ida and pingala. You have to develop inner awareness, relate this to the outside world and change your attitude to other people and things along harmonious lines. One must develop understanding of both oneself and others and try to follow the rule: "Do to others as you would wish them to do unto you."

The balance of the ida and pingala is the 'middle path'. It is basically the same path

that Buddha advocated but put in different words. This balanced attitude towards life, both internally and externally, will bring greater selflessness. It will arise spontaneously through understanding brought about by the simultaneous development of inner awareness and outer expression. It arises through simultaneous balancing of the ida and pingala at all levels. This is the way to unfold the potential that is your heritage. Bear this balance in mind and apply it as much as possible. Practise meditation techniques etc. in the inner world combined with karma yoga in the outside world. This is so important.

Summary

We have discussed the meaning and implications of ida and pingala at the following levels:

1. *Physically* in relation to the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems, and in turn the organs and functions of the entire body. Balance of ida and pingala at this level helps to maintain or bring about perfect health.

2. *Mentally and pranically* with regard to energy flows and direction of thoughts. Overstimulation of either the ida or pingala aspect of the psyche can bring disharmony. There must be balance.

3. *Inner awareness and outer expression*. Failure to develop inner awareness and also rejection of external actions both act as obstacles on the path to higher understanding and bliss. There must be detachment from both inner and outer events, but with continued participation in the world and simultaneous development and intensification of inner awareness.

Balance of ida and pingala at all levels is most important if you want to gain good health, if you want peace of mind, and if you want to attain understanding of your own being⁶.

Notes

¹ The chakras have been fully discussed in Lessons 19, 20 and 21

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

⁴ For further details refer to Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 2

⁵ For more information refer to Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 3

⁶ For the second part of this discussion refer to Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1



BSY ©

Anahata

Anahata Chakra

The anahata chakra is the fourth chakra, coming after the mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. It is located in the heart region of the spine.

Definition

The word *anahata* means 'unstruck' or 'unbeaten'. Therefore, the anahata chakra is the centre of unbeaten sound. That is, the cosmic sound (*shabda brahman*) is heard at this centre . . . a sound that does not arise as a result of two objects hitting each other as do other sounds. The sound that is heard is uncaused.

This chakra is also widely called the *hridaya chakra*, heart centre, because of its location.

Attributes

This centre is widely regarded as the centre of consciousness (*jivatma*) in man. Because of this, many sects say that this is the best place to concentrate during meditation practices. In the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali (3:34) it says: "The Atma is realized by reflection at the heart centre (anahata chakra)." In this context, one can create a mental image at this centre in the *hridayakasha* (ethereal space at the heart centre), chant a mantra, continually repeat an enquiry about a certain aspect of existence (as in *jnana yoga*) and many other practices. This centre is so powerful for it is the seat of emotions. These emotions when purified and one-pointed are transformed into devotion. Opening of this chakra produces intense feelings of *bhakti*. One's emotional or devotional power flows in one constant stream, in one direction, transforming the being of an individual. The mind becomes overwhelmingly one-pointed which leads to transcendence.

The anahata chakra is the level where one begins to accept and love everyone and everything unconditionally. One begins to perceive that though people and objects may have gross aspects and differences, they are really embodiments of perfection. One begins to love people

and the objects of the world for what they are. One begins to accept their nature, with its faults and positive qualities, and to realize that everyone and everything is acting according to its *swadharma*. All things are performing specific roles, like actors on a stage, in accordance with inherent qualities. A lion acts like a lion because it is designed to act like a lion. A stone acts like a stone because it has been designed to be like a stone. A human acts in a specific manner because of the inherent human design. This design is *swadharma*.

The attributes of a person at the level of understanding of the anahata chakra are described in the *Shat Chakra Nirupana* (verse 27) as: "Foremost among the yogis he is ever dearer than the dearest beloved husband of a woman. He is wise and performs noble deeds. His senses are under control. His mind is concentrated and ever engrossed in reflection on Brahman. His inspired speech flows like a stream of clear water . . ."

At the level of the anahata chakra, one begins to become more creative, whether in the field of science, art, music, poetry or whatever. Many of the well-known creative people of the world functioned at this level or higher.

Above this chakra level there is progressively less identification with limited human existence. One starts to transcend individual identification. One's identification expands. This is one reason why the *jiva* (individual embodiment of consciousness) is said to reside at anahata.

The ananda kanda

Just below the anahata chakra there is a minor centre called the *ananda kanda*, the root of bliss. It is here that many people create an image of their *ishta devata* (personalized deity) and worship mentally. It is a centre where devotion is intensified.

At this centre there is said to be a celestial tree. In the traditional scriptures it is called

kalpa vriksha (wish fulfilling tree), *kalpaka* and *kalpa taru*, all with the same meaning. It is said to be in Indra's heaven and that it grants all wishes. Of course, this belief is wrapped up in so many stories and myths, but it represents a great truth: that at the level of anahata chakra one tends to receive what one wishes for. This is a strange thing, but nevertheless an aspect of the ascent into the realms of higher understanding. One's wishes will tend to bear fruit if the sankalpa (wish or resolve) is strong enough. This applies to both positive and negative wishes. Therefore, a person at this level must be careful not to make negative resolves otherwise there will be destructive and painful results. For example, it is possible to bring about severe illness by mere thought (*sankalpa*). However, the law of existence makes it generally impossible for people with negative attitudes to ascend to this level. There has to be a degree of self-purification before one rises to the level of the anahata chakra, otherwise negative thoughts and ambitions could easily destroy and cause great harm.

In some tantric texts the *kalpa vriksha* is also called *chintamani*. The Sanskrit word *chinta* here means 'thoughts' and *man*; means 'jewel'. Therefore, *chintamani* means 'the jewel of thought'. It is said that the *chintamani* is a tree growing in the middle of a divine lake. The divine lake is located in the middle of a beautiful garden. The garden is said to be the abode of divine beings. The meaning of this scene is that people who live at the level of anahata chakra have a divine awareness, and that whatever they wish will happen.

We don't ask you to believe the implications behind this centre called the ananda kanda; it is better to tread the tantric-yogic path and discover the experiences for yourself.

Symbolism

There are various ways of symbolizing the anahata chakra. The diagram that we have given is one. The central figure is a blue lotus with twelve petals. In many traditional diagrams the petals are inscribed with the following Sanskrit letters: कं (kam), खं (kham), गं (gam), घं (gham), ङं (nam), चं (cham), छं (chham), जं (jam), झं (jham), ञं (nam), टं (tam) and ठं (tham). We have omitted these letters in our diagram for the sake of simplicity. In the centre of the lotus there are two interlaced triangles, which

together form a hexagon (Star of David). The upward pointing triangle indicates the direction of higher understanding and awareness – the spiritual path. The downward pointing triangle indicates the direction of descent into lower states of awareness and understanding. The anahata chakra is a midway point on the path between mundane levels of existence at the mooladhara chakra and transcendental levels at the ajna and above. The upward pointing triangle indicates Shiva (consciousness) and the downward triangle represents Shakti (the power of manifestation and creator of limitation and individuality). At the level of the anahata there is perfect balance between these two aspects of existence in the individual. The upward pointing triangle indicates the path of *nivritti*, the return to the source of being; the downward facing triangle means the *pravritti* path, the path of entanglement in the world of illusion. There are also many other meanings behind the two triangles.

At the bottom of the lotus there is the mantra यं (yam). This is the bija (seed) mantra of the anahata chakra.

In the centre of the diagram there is a candle flame, which symbolizes the spark of life and consciousness that exists in all things and which is particularly luminous in man. It represents the *jivatman* (the divine light in man). In some traditional diagrams of the anahata chakra the flame is represented by a *lingam* instead. It is called the *bana lingam*, and is said to be golden in colour and lustrous like ten thousand suns. Both the *lingam* and the flame have the same meaning as the *akhandajyoti* (eternal flame) that is kept burning day and night in many ashrams. The light of consciousness spreads out in all directions – it is unlimited. This is symbolized in the diagram by the four rays radiating out in four directions.

The anahata chakra is the centre of devotion; therefore, the colours of the given diagrams have been printed to convey an emotional tone. Incidentally, one of the greatest symbols of the anahata chakra is Hanuman, the monkey deity of the Indian scripture called the *Ramayana*. It is he who shows total devotion to Rama in every action and thought. It is this devotion and identification that leads directly to transcendence.

Much more can be said about the symbology of the anahata chakra, especially with regard

to deities etc. We leave you to see more in the symbolic diagram.

Location

Anahata chakra is located in the spine directly behind the heart; though perhaps directly behind the centre of the chest is a more exact description.

At first the mental location of the anahata chakra is quite difficult. A useful aid in developing sensitivity to the exact point in the spine is as follows: place one finger at the centre of the chest; place the other hand behind the back and try to place a finger on the spine at the same horizontal level as the finger in the front of the body. If necessary use a mirror or the help of another person to find exactly the right position. Then apply a greater pressure on the spine with the finger. With the eyes closed, feel the sensation of pressure and try to locate the exact position. With time and practice this will help you to find the exact location of the point of the anahata chakra.

Anahata kshetram

The point on the front of the chest in front of the anahata chakra trigger point is called the *anahata kshetram*. It is widely used in kriya yoga practices. You should be able to mentally locate this point as well as the chakra trigger point in the spine. The following practice will help you to be able to do this.

ANAHATA SHUDDHI (PURIFICATION OF ANAHATA)

The method of locating the anahata chakra and kshetram is called *anahata shuddhi* – the purification of the anahata. It is very simple and the procedure is as follows.

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Hold the back straight, but without strain.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of the expansion and contraction of the chest as you breathe in and out.

Feel as though the breath is being pulled in and out at the chest (anahata kshetram) as the chest expands and contracts.

As you breathe in, feel the breath being pulled from the anahata chakra trigger point in the spine through the anahata kshetram and outwards in front of the body.

As you breathe out, feel the breath being pushed inwards through the anahata kshetram to the anahata chakra in the spine.

Try to feel the exact locations of the chakra and kshetram.

Continue in this way for about 10 minutes.

Then synchronize the mantra Aum with the breathing process: Aum with inhalation and Aum with exhalation.

Feel the breath and the mantra piercing the chakra and kshetram in the same way as already described.

Continue in this manner for the time that you have assigned for the practice; at least 10 minutes is recommended.

Integration with Ajapa

In this topic we have described ajapa stage 3¹. As the breath moves up and down between the navel and the throat, feel the piercing of the manipura and anahata kshetram. With practice this will become very distinct.

CHAKRA SHUDDHI (PURIFICATION THE CHAKRAS)

Location of the other chakras

Over the previous three lessons we have given techniques for locating and gaining sensitivity to the mooladhara², swadhisthana³, and manipura trigger points⁴, and the corresponding kshetram. If you can now locate these points easily and clearly, then you can start to practise *chakra shuddhi* instead. This practice is very simple and is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes.

Begin with the mooladhara chakra.

Centre your attention at mooladhara chakra².

Mentally chant Aum 21 times, synchronizing the chanting with the pulse beat at mooladhara.

Then repeat the same thing first with the swadhisthana chakra and then the kshetram; chant Aum mentally 21 times at each location in coordination with the pulse³.

Then repeat the same thing with the manipura chakra and kshetram⁴.

If you have time, repeat the whole process, starting again from mooladhara.

If you wish you can use a mala to record the 21 chants at each location. Tie a knot after the twenty-first bead. Then rotate the mala at each location until you reach the knot; then

reverse the rotation back to the sumeru bead⁵. It is important however that most of your attention is on feeling the mantra vibration at the chakra and kshetram sites, the minimum being directed to the rotation of the mala.

We suggest you practise this technique from now onwards to develop sensitively to the chakra and kshetram locations. If you have difficulty in feeling these sites then continue with the individual chakra practices described previously.

Notes

¹ Topic 5 of this lesson

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3

⁴ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3

⁵ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

Asanas: Sirshasana (Part 2)

Sirshasana is not dangerous if it is developed gradually over a period of time, and providing the basic rules are carefully followed. Many people are apprehensive, suspicious and disinclined to do it.

It is often pointed out that it seems unnatural to invert the body for a period of time and if it were necessary then we would walk about on our hands. Well, maybe. But man is also designed to do a lot of physical exercise and not sit in one position for protracted lengths of time. Vigorous and regular exercise speeds up the blood circulation and ensures that the brain receives sufficient well oxygenated blood. Exercise also prevents blood stagnating in the lower parts of the body such as the legs; lack of exercise, which is the characteristic of modern city dwelling man, leads to varicose veins, haemorrhoids and general inefficiency of the organs of the body.

So sirshasana is in a sense an unnatural method of combating an unnatural lifestyle. Apart from this, however, sirshasana is an excellent method of bringing about calmness and concentration in preparation for meditative practices.

Scientific experiments

Various experiments have been conducted to measure the changes that occur within the body during the practice of sirshasana. These confirm scientifically what we have discovered from personal experience.

X-rays taken during the practice of sirshasana have shown a considerable shift of the diaphragm, changes in the longitudinal and transverse dimensions of the heart, and widening of the arteries and veins leading to and from the lungs, especially in the upper lobes. The significance is that more blood is travelling to and from the lungs, increasing oxygenation. The upper lobe which usually is not well oxygenated by a normal breath, is washed free of stagnant blood.

The tests clearly indicate that the amount of air breathed per minute (minute ventilation) during the performance of sirshasana was considerably reduced. The frequency of respiration (the number of breaths per minute) was lowered. Oxygen consumption by the tissues increased and the amount of oxygen exhaled was less, indicating that the transfer of oxygen to the blood is greatly increased.

There was an increase in the leucocyte (white blood cell) count, implying that the body's ability to withstand and resist infection is increased as the white blood cells are used to destroy bacteria and other foreign objects in the body.

These tests are significant and apply if the individual is completely relaxed. If the practitioner is tense or stressed while performing sirshasana, then it is possible to obtain contradictory results.

From these experiments we can conclude that sirshasana allows for a greater possibility of adaptive mechanisms in respect to circulation and respiration.

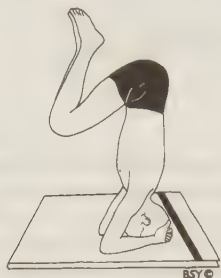
In the future, no doubt, more intricate experiments will be carried out to record and map out the actual blood flow changes in the brain; how the blood flow to the pituitary and pineal is modified and how it improves their functional efficiency; how other organs of the body are influenced and so forth. The influence of sirshasana on brain waves would also be an interesting scientific experiment. There is much scope for these kinds of tests and they would put the physical benefits obtainable from sirshasana on a firm scientific basis.

SIRSHASANA (HEADSTAND POSE) – PART 2

Technique for the last three stages

The most difficult aspect of mastering sirshasana is raising the body into the final pose. Once this is achieved then staying in the final

pose presents little difficulty. If you have perfected the first three stages, then you are ready to master the last three stages¹.



Stage 4: raising the legs

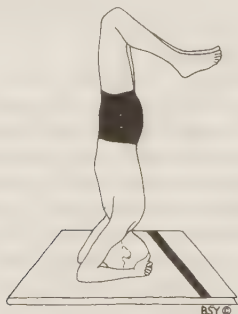
When you can raise your feet off the ground in stage 3 without losing balance, then you are ready to do stage 4.

Slowly raise your legs upwards, taking care to adjust your centre of balance accordingly; that is, the position of the trunk has to be slightly adjusted to counterbalance the weight of the legs.

Fold the legs upwards and backwards so that the heels move towards the buttocks.

This movement is accomplished by contracting the muscles of the lower back.

Take care that you maintain equilibrium and you don't fall backwards.



Stage 5: elevating the knees

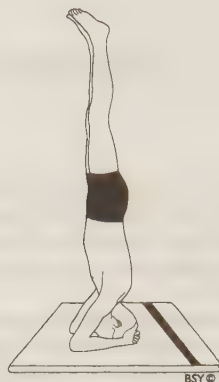
At the end of stage 4 the knees still point downwards.

Keeping the heels near the buttocks, slowly raise the knees upwards.

In the final position of stage 5 the knees should point directly upwards, with the feet pointing downwards.

Make sure that the spine and thighs are in

line, straight and vertical. Then proceed on to the final stage.



Stage 6: final pose

Slowly raise the feet so that they point upwards and the legs become straight.

The whole body should lie in one straight line. This is the final pose of sirshasana.

Make sure that you feel perfect balance; at first you may tend to wobble a little, but with practice you become very stable in the pose, as stable as in the standing position.

Relax the whole body as much as possible.

Close the eyes.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then return to the starting position on the floor in the reverse order stages 6 to 1.

Points to remember in the technique

- Don't move the head or arms after stage 1. If you do so you may lose balance. If you feel discomfort then you should return to the starting position, make any adjustments and then again perform the asana.
- If you lose balance make sure that you land on the ground in the way previously described¹.
- Keep the whole body vertical in the final pose; don't incline it backwards, forwards or sideways.
- Try to relax as many muscles as possible in the final position.
- Don't point the toes upwards in the final pose for this contracts the leg muscles and will impede free drainage of blood from the legs. Relax the feet and legs.

- Try to ensure that most of the weight of the body is supported on the head in the final position and not the arms. The arms should be used mainly to maintain equilibrium. At first you may be inclined to use the arms to provide much of the support for the body; there is nothing wrong with this, but over a period of time try to gradually let the head take the main supportive role.

Returning to the ground

You should return to the starting position by doing the stages in reverse order. The body should be lowered slowly and with control. Don't let the body drop down, try to come down so gently that the feet make no sound when they touch the floor.

Breathing, awareness and duration

In the starting position breathe in. Hold the breath inside while raising the body to the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply in the final position. Breathe in deeply and then hold the breath as you lower the body to the starting position.

While raising and lowering the body, the attention should be on correct movement, synchronization of the different movements and on maintaining balance. In the final position you can be aware of breathing, or the centre of the head, or you can visualize any psychic symbol in front of your closed eyes. You can choose anything. Beginners, however, should direct their awareness to maintaining balance.

Experts who are in perfect health and who have been doing sirshasana for many years, can practise for up to thirty minutes. But we don't recommend this to most people, especially beginners. Prolonged duration by inexperienced people could cause more harm than good. Furthermore, we strongly recommend that anyone wanting to do sirshasana for more than five minutes at a time should consult a yoga school or ashram for guidance.

Beginners should start with no more than thirty seconds. This duration can be gradually increased by about ten seconds a day (about one minute per week) until the duration is five minutes. At this point you should seek expert advice. This slow increase in duration is important, for it allows the blood vessels in the brain to slowly adjust and accustom themselves

to the extra blood pressure that occurs in the final pose. Also, the neck muscles must be slowly strengthened; in fact the entire body must be gradually accustomed to the inversion of the body. You must use your common sense in deciding how long to remain in the final pose. If you feel the slightest fatigue, trembling, head strain or general anxiety then stop doing the asana.

Eventually you should aim to stay in the final position for at least three minutes, since it takes a minute or so for the inverted position to bring changes in the body, especially the blood flow to the brain and the drainage of blood from the legs. Under no circumstances should you strain or stay in the final pose for longer than is comfortable.

Counterpose

More than most other asanas, the counterpose to sirshasana is essential to return normality to the body functions. Various types of counterposes are recommended by different people. Some people advise tadasana, others shavasana and some say that the body should be massaged in a standing position. We recommend the following procedure: remain in the kneeling position for about thirty seconds with the head on the ground after having lowered the body from the final pose, then do tadasana for about a minute². While doing tadasana, try to remain balanced on tiptoes for the whole minute, with the eyes focussed on a point on the wall in front of the body. If you wish, you can practise shavasana for a few minutes after tadasana³.

Sequence

The order in which sirshasana should be done in the daily practice program depends on various factors.

If you only do asanas without pranayama and meditative techniques, then practise sirshasana at the beginning of the program. This will increase attentiveness so that you gain the most out of the other asanas. If your practice program includes pranayama and/or meditative practices then you should do sirshasana immediately after the other asanas. The reason is that the other asanas loosen up the body so that you are less distracted by physical aches and pains during pranayama and meditative practice. They also enhance

awareness and wakefulness. Sirshasana then intensifies the awareness so that one gains the most out of the subsequent practices of pranayama and meditation.

Beginners should generally do the practice after other asanas when their system has been purified and balanced.

Time of practice

Sirshasana can be done at any time during the day, but it should not be done for at least three or four hours after meals and for thirty minutes after vigorous physical exercise. The ideal time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast.

Persons who should not do sirshasana

There is a wide range of people who should not attempt sirshasana. They include sufferers of the following ailments:

- High blood pressure
- Weak or malfunctioning heart
- Cerebral or coronary thrombosis
- Arteriosclerosis
- Weak eye blood vessels
- Conjunctivitis and chronic glaucoma
- Any form of haemorrhage in the head
- Otia (inflammation of the ears)
- Chronic catarrh (sirshasana can help in the early stages, but can aggravate the condition in the later chronic stages)
- Slipped disc (if you have a slipped disc it is very difficult to raise the body to the final pose)
- Extremely impure blood, since the impurities could be directed into the brain. If you are not sure about the condition of your blood then you should seek expert advice. One sure indication of impure blood is chronic constipation and excessive spots and pimples.
- Kidney problems, since this could possibly imply that your blood is not being efficiently cleaned of waste materials.

This is only a brief list. There are many other types of ailments which preclude the practice of sirshasana. Again if you are not sure, contact a yoga school or ashram for proper guidance.

Before attempting to practise sirshasana, make sure that you are not one of the people who should not do it.

Temporary restrictions

Sirshasana should not be done under the following circumstances:

- If your bowels are excessively full.
- If you feel physically tired.
- If you have a headache or migraine. These conditions are often associated with a slightly elevated blood pressure in the brain; if you do sirshasana then the condition will be aggravated.
- Directly after eating a meal (three to four hours should have elapsed before attempting the practice)
- Until thirty minutes have elapsed after intense physical exercise, as the blood will contain excessive impurities associated with by-products of muscular activities. These impurities must firstly be eliminated from the blood in the normal manner through urination, perspiration or respiration. Sirshasana can be practised after other asanas since these do not build up the toxic levels of the blood; in fact if they are done correctly, they will reduce blood impurities.
- During pregnancy or menstruation.
- Sirshasana should be immediately terminated if you develop a headache, feel dizziness, perspire profusely, become very hot, have palpitations of the heart or if you feel generally uncomfortable.
- Also discontinue the asana if you feel any suffocation.

These rules may seem rather numerous, but they are necessary so that you don't harm yourself.

General advice

There are no specific age restrictions for practising sirshasana, but elderly people should be careful.

In the final pose, you may initially experience partial blockage of the nose. Try to persevere and you should find that the breathing becomes easier after a short period of time. Don't breathe through the mouth. If breathing is too difficult then terminate the asana for a minute or so and then repeat.

Like all asanas, it is not necessary to use excessive energy to practise sirshasana. Intense effort is a definite sign that you are either doing sirshasana incorrectly or that you should not be doing it in the first place. Try to perform it with as much relaxation as possible.

Benefits

The benefits obtainable from regular practise of sirshasana are extensive. The following is merely a summary.

Perfect health of the brain cells allows the brain and in turn the physical body to function efficiently and to full capacity. The thought processes are allowed to manifest more vividly. Sirshasana directs an enriched oxygenated supply of blood to the brain cells. This blood flow is at a slightly increased pressure due to action of gravity. Blood vessels are very elastic and can dilate or constrict according to the prevailing blood pressure. Therefore, the higher blood pressure in the brain dilates the blood vessels and opens out those that have become closed or blocked. This means that the entire brain and all the billions of cells receive more nourishment. Consequently all the cells are rejuvenated and thereby work more effectively. The extra flow of blood under a slightly elevated pressure also flushes out accumulated toxins and general waste material from the brain cells. This is analogous to cleaning accumulated dirt in a blocked pipe by using a strong flow of water, it may take only a few minutes to clean a pipe in this manner, and the improvement in the normal flow through the pipe is great. It is similar with the brain; though sirshasana may be done only for a few minutes every day, it can rejuvenate and revitalize the entire brain. In turn, the whole body health can be greatly improved.

Such ailments as headache and migraine are believed to be partly caused by compression of certain blood vessels in the brain. Sirshasana helps to relax and strengthen these vessels and thereby prevent the occurrence of these ailments. Note, however, that sirshasana should not be done during the actual time of headache or migraine. These ailments are also associated with mental tension, so sirshasana helps to prevent these ailments by inducing calmness.

The increased blood flow to the brain revitalizes all the nervous centres and the controller of the endocrinal system, the pituitary. In this way, sirshasana helps to rectify various types of glandular and nervous disorders. It can have a significant and positive influence in relieving diabetes. As we have already pointed out, the probable root cause of diabetes is the pituitary gland⁴. The symptom

of the disease manifests in malfunctioning of the pancreas. It is believed that with sufferers of diabetes, the pituitary secretes too much diabetogenic hormone. Medically, it is very difficult to interfere with the functioning of the pituitary gland, and so modern medicine is forced to treat diabetes with insulin. Sirshasana, however, acts directly on the pituitary gland by improving the blood supply and this has been found to be a great help in combating diabetes. This is especially true if sirshasana is supplemented with other relaxation practices of yoga which reduce the tension level that interferes with the normal working of the pituitary. So if you are a diabetic, and there are no further serious ailments, then we suggest you start practising sirshasana as well as other yogic techniques.

Sirshasana has also been found to be a great help in combating sexual disorders such as prostate problems, hydrocele, leucorrhea, spermatorrhea and all general menopausal and menstrual ailments. If you refer to the previous discussion on the endocrinal system, you will appreciate how all the complex sexual functions are controlled by the pituitary gland⁴. Sirshasana helps to relieve sexual disorders in a number of ways.

- It improves the efficiency of the pituitary and the hypothalamus (the brain centre that in turn controls the pituitary gland).
- It drains blood from the associated sexual endocrinal glands (ovaries or testes) and the associated sexual organs; this also improves their functional efficiency.
- Sirshasana combined with relaxation or meditative techniques of yoga helps to calm the mind. Anxiety is the greatest factor in causing sexual disorders. Calmness of mind automatically leads to perfect health of the sexual functions.

If you suffer from any sexual problems then we suggest you start practising sirshasana along with other yogic practices.

The regular practice of sirshasana also acts directly on the thyroid gland in the same way as sarvangasana⁵, helping to balance the metabolic functions and bring about wakefulness and alertness, but without excessive nervousness. Malfunctioning of the thyroid gland can result in many ailments either directly or indirectly. Sirshasana helps to bring perfect health to this vital gland.

Sirshasana helps to improve the operation of the sensory organs. That is, it can help to improve eyesight, hearing and the senses of smell and taste. The eyes require a large supply of oxygen in order to work perfectly. The extra supply of blood during sirshasana helps to bring this about. Besides making the sensory organs more healthy, sirshasana also directly influences the brain centres that interpret and control the sense organs. Various types of ailments such as myopia, astigmatism, catarrh and general bad hearing have been found to improve by regular practise of sirshasana.

The condition of the skin of the face can also be improved through regular practise of sirshasana. Pimples and wrinkles are often caused by inadequate removal of waste materials and insufficient nourishment from the blood. Sirshasana directs an oxygen rich flow of blood to the facial skin thereby improving the complexion.

There are a number of people who claim to have transformed grey hair into its original colour through the practice of sirshasana. There are also people who now have a good growth of hair through the same practice, having been partially bald before. This is not really surprising since greying of hair and balding are often due to bad blood circulation in the scalp. Sirshasana does not only direct enriched blood to the brain, it also sends it to the scalp. However to gain this kind of spectacular result sirshasana must be practised for a long period every day, longer than we would recommend for the average person. If you wish to do sirshasana for this purpose then we suggest you seek expert guidance.

While the upper part of the body receives an extra supply of blood, the lower parts are drained of blood. This has beneficial repercussions, since there is a tendency for blood to stagnate in the legs, in the pelvic and abdominal organs. This drainage removes impure stagnant blood so that it can be replaced with pure, oxygenated blood after terminating sirshasana. Two very common ailments are varicose veins and piles (haemorrhoids) caused by accumulation of blood in the legs and anus respectively. This places great pressure on the blood vessels and in time causes them injury. Regular practise of sirshasana relieves pressure on the vessels for a short time and is a great help in alleviating either of these ailments.

Sirshasana revitalizes the pelvic and abdominal organs, improving their associated functions: digestion, elimination, etc., and can help to remove related ailments. The drainage of blood from these organs is also increased by the deep breathing and thereby the massage from the diaphragm acting upwards against the weight of the organs. This action actually squeezes out the blood.

During inhalation the diaphragm has to move upwards against the weight of the abdominal organs, strengthening the diaphragm since it has greater resistance than normal. Furthermore, this increases the air pressure in the lungs slightly and thereby opens up and uncrumples the alveoli (air cells), improving the oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange within the lungs, which means that the body receives more oxygen and removes more unwanted carbon dioxide. This supplements the health benefits obtained from the improved blood circulation to the brain.

Sirshasana gives many more benefits. Also with many ailments, the influence is more subtle or indirect; as such it is difficult to attribute the effect directly to sirshasana. Practice improves the sense of balance and helps to relieve neurasthenia (caused by malfunctioning of certain nervous centres in the brain). Memory power, intellect, concentration, etc. are all mental functions, yet it is through the brain that they are expressed.

Opening up the dormant pathways of the brain

As one treads the path of yoga, or any other mind expanding system, the body and mind become progressively purified. This also includes the brain. Furthermore, dormant nervous pathways are opened up to take greater flows of nervous impulses; this occurs in conjunction with the modification of the pranic pathways within the human framework. Sirshasana helps to open up these brain channels and to facilitate the expanding of brain capacity. The capacity of the brain is heightened in order to receive and cope with more intense flows of energy and awareness. The brain becomes a more efficient instrument.

Sirshasana and meditation

Sirshasana improves the blood flow to the pineal gland. Compared to other organs

of the body, this tiny gland has the second largest blood supply per unit weight (first is the kidneys). Stimulation of this gland, by improving the blood flow or otherwise, helps to increase awareness of the more subtle realms of your being. Sirshasana directly stimulates this gland and thereby intensifies awareness. As such sirshasana if done for prolonged periods of time can be considered as a meditative practise in its own right. Because of other factors, however, we don't suggest that you practise sirshasana for more than a few minutes without guidance. Therefore, you can use sirshasana, practised for short periods, as a method of intensifying awareness and making perception more subtle in preparation for other traditional meditative techniques.

The brain is a switching station between your individuality and the more subtle layers of the mind. The more efficient the brain becomes the more able it becomes to tune in with more subtle layers of existence. In this sense we say that each individual has vast untapped potential. All yogic practices, and in particular sirshasana, gradually make the brain more sensitive.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 3

³ Shavasana: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5
Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

⁴ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 1

⁵ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

Pranayama: Practice

In this lesson we have given a long discussion on *Ida* and *pingala*, which should clearly indicate the importance of these two polarities of being. On a physical-pranic-mental level, balance can be greatly influenced by practices of pranayama, specifically *nadi shodhana* pranayama stages 1 and 2¹. These are preliminary stages, but they are nevertheless important techniques for ensuring balance between *ida* and *pingala*. If you have the time, and only if you do, we suggest that you practise these two stages before the more advanced stages of pranayama and meditative practices such as *ajapa*. This will help you to gain the most out of these practices. If the flow in the two nostrils is balanced however, it is not necessary to practise these balancing techniques.

MAHA BANDHA (THE GREAT LOCK)

Uddiyana bandha combined with *jalandhara*, as previously described, and *moola bandha* is called *maha bandha*. The method is as follows: Practise *uddiyana bandha* combined with *jalandhara bandha*².

Then contract the perineum as described in the practice of *moola bandha*³.

This is the final position.

Retain your breath for as long as comfortable.

Then release *moola bandha*, *uddiyana* and finally *jalandhara bandha*.

This is 1 round.

MAHA BANDHA COMBINED WITH NADI SHODHANA

If you have mastered the previous pranayama technique, then you can now incorporate it with *maha bandha*⁴. The method is exactly the same, but instead of doing *uddiyana* and *jalandhara bandha*, you now do *maha bandha*, with external breath retention (*bahir kumbhaka*).

The previous ratio was 1:8:6:2:1:8:6:2 for inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention: inhalation: inner retention: exhalation: outer retention. *Maha bandha* is performed during outer retention only. If you can comfortably perform the *bandha* with this ratio then do so, but it must be without any strain. If necessary adjust the ratio according to your own capacity. Experiment, find out the ideal ratio and practise it.

Relevance to kriya yoga

Maha bandha is directly used in *kriya yoga* practices; therefore, mastery is essential. We urge you to practise it regularly, but without straining. This will be a valuable preparation for *kriya yoga* in Book III.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4; Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5 and Book I Lesson 5, Topic 4

² Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁴ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 4

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 3)

The main difference between japa and ajapa is that japa generally functions on the conscious plane of the mind, whereas ajapa reaches down into the subconscious plane. At this present moment, while reading this book, you are conscious of the external world and of the surface levels of the mind. But the mind is also functioning at other levels below the level of conscious perception. The subconscious mind is a turmoil of fears, worries, tensions, desires, etc. We generally only experience the reflection or manifestation of these deeper aspects of the mind when they rise to surface perception. Ajapa is a method of consciously perceiving these hidden levels of the mind. The practice of ajapa makes one's sensitivity and perception more subtle so that one begins to explore the mind.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 3

Continuous practice

We are teaching the practice of ajapa which is done for a fixed duration every day. If you are inclined, there is no reason why you should not try to do ajapa twenty-four hours every day. But we warn you: it is difficult and requires sustained effort. If you wish to adopt this twenty-four hour a day sadhana then there is no need to slow down the breathing rate as described in stage 1 and 2¹. Only try to be aware of the breath and the sound *Soham*, that it makes. It does not matter whether the breath is fast or slow; only be aware of it and the associated mantra. It can be done while walking, talking, eating, working, sleeping or whatever you do in your daily life. Everyday activities are continued but with a background of the *Soham* mantra.

This is an extremely powerful technique that has been used by many of the great yogis such as Kabir Das. It is a method that is widely mentioned in many well-known scriptures such as the *Yogasiksha Upanishad* and the *Kularnava*

Tantra. In the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* it says: "The breath comes out with the sound *Ha* (Ham) and is taken in with the sound *Sa* (So). Thus each individual continuously repeats the mantra *Hamsa . . . Hamsa . . . Hamsa* (*Soham . . . Soham . . . Soham*). Therefore, this mantra is repeated throughout the day. This is called *ajapa gayatri* and can bring liberation to yogis." (v. 31, 32, 33)

This indicates the power of continuous ajapa. This is further emphasized in the *Kularnava Tantra*: "The more you repeat this mantra (*Soham* or *Saham*), the greater the fruits both temporal and spiritual. Therefore, with intense effort, in all conditions, at all times, you should repeat the mantra." (chapter 3)

Continuous repetition makes the mantra penetrate the deeper layers of the mind, and the mind becomes harmonized and one-pointed, leading to meditation. If you have the determination, then follow the advice given in the scriptures. It is by no means an easy undertaking, but the fruits of your effort will be to unlock the potential of your mind.

Technique

It is important that you don't proceed to stage 3 until you have mastered the two previous stages, spending at least two weeks to one month on each stage¹. This is important, for one stage automatically leads to the next.

In stage 1 the mantra *Soham* was synchronized with breathing. In stage 2, the mantra *Hamsa* was merged with breathing. In stage 3 *Ham* and *So* will be regarded as totally separate entities, *Ham* being synchronized with exhalation and *So* with inhalation. The method is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Hold the back straight, but relaxed.

Become aware of the breathing process, making it slower and deeper.

Do *ujjayi pranayama* and *khechari mudra*².

Be totally attentive to the breathing.

Do this for a few minutes.

Then imagine that the breath is moving upwards and downwards between the navel and the throat.

Imagine that you are pulling, sucking the air upwards from the navel to the throat as you inhale.

Imagine that you are pushing the air downwards from the throat to the navel as you exhale.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

Then merge the mantra *So* with inhalation.

And *Ham* with exhalation.

Don't be aware of either *Soham* or *Hamso* . . . only be aware of the mantra *So* with the incoming breath and *Ham* with the outgoing breath; *So* and *Ham* should not be continuous or joined with each other; they should be completely separate entities.

At the end of inhalation *So* stops.

Ham starts at the beginning of exhalation.

Ham stops at the end of exhalation.

So starts at the beginning of inhalation.

With the upward moving breath – inhalation hear the sound *So*.

With the downward breath – exhalation – hear the sound *Ham*.

Maintain this awareness of the individual mantras and the up and down breathing process for about 5 minutes, then stop the practice and become aware only of the chidakasha (the space in front of the closed eyes)³.

Only be a witness to whatever happens in front of the closed eyes.

If you see images or you don't, it does not matter; only watch as a spectator.

This is the way to confront the contents of the subconscious mind. After a few minutes, recontinue the awareness of the two individual mantras and the upward and downward movement of the breath.

After 5 minutes or so, again become aware of the chidakasha.

After a minute or so return to the practice of ajapa: mantra and breath awareness.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

Khechari Mudra and Ujjayi Pranayama

You will probably find that you forget to do these two practices during ajapa. Try to

maintain them throughout the practice. If you become tired, especially with khechari mudra, then release the tongue lock for a short time, but it should be recommenced. These two practices are very important.

Ajapa and kriya yoga

This is a reminder that ajapa is an essential preliminary practice for kriya yoga. If you have not started doing ajapa yet and you want to practise kriya yoga in the near future, then we urge you to begin practising ajapa on a regular basis. If you don't you will find kriya yoga very difficult . . . you will fail to reap the benefits. It is important if you are serious about practising kriya yoga to find the time to practise ajapa every day.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5; Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced you to the anahata chakra. We suggest you practise it regularly in the manner described to locate the trigger point and the kshetram. Over the last few lessons we have given techniques for locating the trigger point and kshetram of the mooladhara, swadhisthana and manipura chakras. If you can reasonably clearly locate these points, then we suggest you leave these techniques and practise chakra shuddhi. If you cannot locate these points clearly then continue with the practices that we have already given.

Start to practise ajapa stage 3 and try to feel the breath and mantra piercing the anahata and manipura kshetrams.

If you have mastered stages 1, 2 and 3 of sirshasana then you should proceed to stages 4, 5 and 6. Please don't attempt the final stages until you have fully mastered the three preliminary stages. This is important.

Now incorporate maha bandha with nadi shodhana pranayama as explained in the text.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	4
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Yoga Mudrasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	4
Sirshasana – Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Maha Bandha	15
Anahata Shuddhi	20
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Ajapa Japa – Stage 3	19
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	4
Sirshasana – Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Maha Bandha	10
Manipura Chakra location	10
Anahata Shuddhi	15
Chakra Shuddhi	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 3	9
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana – Stages 4, 5, 6	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Maha Bandha	10
Anahata Shuddhi	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 3	10
	60

Try to find the time to practise Chakra Shuddhi.

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health
benefits

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana – Stages 4, 5, 6	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Maha Bandha	10
	30

Try to find the time to practise Ajapa Japa
and Chakra Shuddhi

Lesson 23

What is the meaning behind the ida and pingala? It is trying to tell you a great secret of spiritual life. It is trying to tell you that there should not be attachment to the inner phenomena of the mind; nor should there be attachment to the phenomena of the outside world. One has to centre right in the middle where there is pure awareness. This awareness is neither in the inside world nor in the outside world . . . it is in the middle and beyond both. Therefore, try to be detached both internally and externally. It is only in this way that there will be the jump into the realm of pure awareness . . . the sushumna . . . the subtle, blissful vortex or tube that passes through all the chakras. This centring of the ida and pingala and detachment to both the inner and outer world is not easy. In fact, you cannot make it happen consciously. It can only happen spontaneously. But at least bear it in mind in your daily life encounters and when you practise yoga techniques. It is this centring, this razor's edge between the ida and pingala principles that is the essence of spiritual life.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

The Balance of Life (Part 2)

Many people are very concerned with the chakras and practising techniques that unlock the potential that they represent. There is nothing wrong with this, but what is usually forgotten is that the awakening of these chakras is associated with balance of the ida and pingala. The ancient sages associated the chakras with the ida and pingala for a good reason, knowing that forceful attempts to awaken the chakras, without corresponding balance of the ida and pingala, could do more harm than good. Many people who have done too much sadhana without taking care to balance and harmonize inner and outer life have found this to be true at their own expense. They have either had bad experiences or have become very ill. So we emphasize: have aspiration to unlock the potential of the chakras, but at the same time try to make sure the ida and pingala are balanced at all levels. Don't be in too much of a hurry to make progress. The process should be slow but sure. This will allow your body, mind and emotions to adjust themselves to new and more refined levels of functioning.

The path of darkness and the path of light

In the Indian scriptures, concern only with the ida, or concern only with the pingala, is called the dark path – the path of the *pitaras* (ancestors). This is the path of delusion.

Simultaneous awakening and balance of the ida and pingala is called the path of light – the path of the devas (divine beings). This is the path where there is simultaneous expansion of inner awareness combined with corresponding action in the outside world.

This is such an important topic that it is mentioned in many texts. For the purpose of illustration and explanation, we will give quotations from the *Ishavasya Upanishad*: “Those who only follow the path of avidya (action in the outside world) enter into blinding darkness. Conversely, those who are engrossed only in

vidya (inner knowledge of the mind or more specifically meditation practices) also enter into blinding darkness.” (verse 9) This is a clear statement that should be remembered: both those who try to open up the ida (inner world) alone through meditation practices and those who are concerned only with the pingala (worldly activities), remain deluded.

The same idea is further expanded in the next verse: “The wise have told us that meditation practices alone and external activity alone will each give a different result.” (verse 10) A certain level of understanding is attained through total concern with worldly activities; another level of understanding is attained through total concern with exploration of the mind through meditation practices. But each eventually becomes a block to further progress. The text continues: “He who knows both vidya (the inner world) and avidya (the outer world) crosses the abyss of death through avidya and attains immortality through vidya.” (verse 11) These three verses are probably the most important verses in the entire literature of the Upanishads.

Both extroversion and introversion must be practised together. Neither must be rejected. One must simultaneously do meditation practices to unfold inner awareness and also work. There should be continual observation of and alertness to the inner process of the mind, while simultaneously acting in the world. This is the path of light, the path of the devas. Balance is given to both the ida and pingala. One becomes a man of inner knowledge while acting in the world. Both karma yoga (the yoga of action) and dhyana yoga (the yoga of meditation) are combined and integrated into one's life.

Let us explain the meaning of the word ‘death’ given in verse 11. It does not mean death in the usual sense of the word. It means the death of delusion – the death of laya (loss of awareness) during meditation

practices. This laya is the greatest block during meditation techniques; it is the obstacle of unconsciousness. People reach a certain stage in their practices where they are unable to maintain awareness. They get lost in a hazy reverie or fall asleep. To progress in unfolding one's dormant potential and to tread the spiritual path, one must pass beyond this laya.

The method of overcoming this obstacle is by doing karma yoga and by interaction with the outside world. This laya is excessive *tamas* in one's nature. By intense karma yoga one can elevate one's nature so that it becomes more *rajasic*. This will counteract the tendency for laya to occur in meditative practices. It is through work in the outside world that one will exhaust one's *samskaras* (problems and negative attitudes, etc.). It is these *samskaras* that cause this unconscious state to arise. They tend to clog the mind and prevent clarity. It is through karma yoga and interaction with other people and life in general that one recognizes and eventually removes one's problems. It is by doing karma yoga that one is able to cross the barrier of unconsciousness – the 'abyss of death' (according to verse 11). When the mind has been harmonized and purged of gross phobias, problems, neuroses, etc., then one can maintain awareness to cross the sea of laya (unconsciousness). It is after this point that one starts to explore the superconscious realms of being.

What is the meaning of gaining 'immortality through vidya' in verse 11? It means that when one has crossed the 'valley of death' – the tendency to become unconscious in meditation – then one expands awareness to an unlimited degree. One is able to transcend the fetters of existence and eventually merge into a state of *samadhi*, the state of immortality, beyond the limitations of the mind.

Verse 11 contains the essence of spiritual life. It emphasizes that the serious spiritual aspirant should be both extroverted and introverted, practising meditation or watching the process of the mind to develop inner awareness, while simultaneously working in the world to resolve any mental and emotional problems. This is the path of light where the *ida* is balanced with the *pingala*. It is this path of light that leads to the rising of the *kundalini* within *sushumna*. It is this path of light that leads to spiritual awakening.

The path of light (*devayana*) and the path of darkness (*pitriyana*) are also mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gita* (chapter 8:23 onwards), where they are called the northern and southern paths of the sun. It has the same profound implications. In the *Prashna Upanishad*, the sage Pippalada gives a similar analogy and the same message in response to a question by his disciple Kabandhi. There are many other scriptures that discuss the same theme. If you are interested, look in the ancient texts yourself for confirmation.

Work or inner knowledge?

If we have a pair of hands, a pair of legs and good health, how is it possible not to work? If we have the tools then they should be used. Yet many people are misguided into thinking that if one wants illumination, or to tread the spiritual path, then one should stop work, or perhaps reduce one's work and be solely concerned with the inner workings of the mind. Many people have said that work (*karma*) and knowledge are mutually exclusive; that if you want illumination then you will have to leave all work and practise meditation day and night. All these ideas are totally wrong and have arisen through misinterpretation of the scriptures and the sages. Not only is this idea wrong, but if followed then it will lead to frustration, lack of progress and blockages on the spiritual path. Many people have made this mistake and are still making this mistake. So make sure you supplement your meditation techniques with some form of action.

It is very easy to see how this misconception about work has arisen. Like many misunderstandings, it has arisen through the inadequacy of words to define more subtle implications and the fact that words can be interpreted in different ways according to the feelings and dogmas of the individual. The Sanskrit word for work is *karma*. Many of the ancient texts clearly state that *karma* does not lead to illumination, but here *karma* does not mean work as such; it means rituals and worship performed without feeling or awareness. And this is absolutely true. This type of *karma* will not lead to illumination, only dullness and ignorance.

The word *karma* also means any kind of work that is done blindly and instinctively, without awareness. This too will lead nowhere

on the spiritual path. One should not stop working: continue to work, to do karma, but while trying to maintain awareness. This is achieved by the aspiration and wakefulness of the individual. This awareness during work is also slowly intensified by doing prescribed yogic techniques such as asanas, pranayama, meditation practices, bhakti yoga and so forth. To maintain a balance of the ida and pingala aspect it is necessary to combine karma yoga with dhyana yoga. To continue to act in the world is essential for spiritual awakening, but one's work and actions should be done with as much awareness as possible. Work is the means to recognize one's problems; it also helps to express and remove them. So don't think of rejecting work or action, but remain detached and transform mere work into karma yoga. Try not to be affected by the ups and downs of work, and don't stop working.

This subject of work and action combined with meditation is the main theme of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the classical yogic text par excellence. It constantly emphasizes that one should never renounce actions, only their fruits. One should only renounce attachment to actions and work. The *Bhagavad Gita* urges the spiritual aspirant to work according to the dictates of his dharma (role in life that comes naturally, that suits one's abilities) but at the same time one should try to become more aware of the inner psychic world through meditation practice. In this sense, the *Bhagavad Gita* is really discussing the balance of the ida and the pingala, without actually mentioning them by name. The whole theme of the *Bhagavad Gita* is balance of ida and pingala.

The importance of action and work in spiritual life is clearly illustrated by the following experience related to us by Swami Satyananda: "Before being initiated as a swami I used to lapse into a state of unconsciousness; I could never go past this state of laya. Eventually I went to seek the guidance of Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh. The first thing he told me was: 'You have to work; you have to work out your samskaras (mental impressions)'." He could have said: "Go and practise meditation for a few years in a quiet place," but he did not. He said: 'work', for he knew that this is the only way to resolve inner disharmonies. Swami Sivananda knew that meditative practices have to be balanced by

external action; the ida and pingala have to be balanced. The mind has to be opened up and purified through both work (karma yoga) and meditative practices.

If you come to this ashram you will also be expected to work throughout the day. This is not to provide cheap labour for the ashram or for the sake of the ashram upkeep, for there are many other people available and willing to do the work necessary for the smooth functioning of the ashram. You will be expected to work for your own sake, for your spiritual progress. This work is one of the most important aspects of ashram life, and actually the biggest problem is not finding people to do work, but finding enough work to keep people busy. This work is important in gradually purifying the mind, especially in the early stages of spiritual life.

Many people try to completely absorb themselves in meditative practices. They cease to take an active part in the world and often retire to a quiet retreat. Many people, sincere and genuine people have done this for years and they have achieved nothing, apart from frustration and disillusionment. They have followed only the ida path. They have failed to gain the illumination that they so desperately wanted. They did not realize that illumination cannot come until one's karmas have been worked out. One has to exhaust and express the inherent desires and ambitions, otherwise they merely remain in a dormant state in the mind. The samskaras – latent problems, drives and attachments to the enjoyments of the world – have to be worked out. This can only be done by interacting and working in the world, by following the principles of karma yoga to the best of your ability. This is the means to clean the mind of its latent problems. This is the pingala aspect. At the same time one should also follow the path of ida, by trying to be aware while working and acting, and by trying to expand inner awareness through meditation practices. This is the way to spiritual unfoldment. It is not by becoming a hermit and rejecting the world.

The path of the wise

If you consider all great illumined sages, saints and yogis you will see a common pattern; they always combined the inner knowledge of the mind with outer actions. Though they had

spiritual illumination they still continued to express themselves in the external world; they always worked, but while maintaining inner awareness. This is the difference between the average person and the sage. The average person acts without awareness, while the sage keeps a continual flow of awareness. Most people perform actions (the realm of Shakti) with little or no awareness (the realm of Shiva). The sage acts, gives expression to his individuality (Shakti) but while maintaining the awareness of the totality (Shiva). He merges the logically opposite aspects of individuality and universality, of action and inaction, of Shiva and Shakti.

Let us consider a few well-known sages to illustrate the common principle of balance and harmony of the ida and pingala. Christ was illumined, yet he continued to act in the world. He taught his disciples, apostles and followers and travelled all over Galilee. He acted with total awareness. St. Teresa was an illumined saint, but she did not stop working, she did more and more work and urged her followers to do the same. Kabir was an illumined bhakta, but he continued to earn his living by weaving and expressed his illumination through his ecstatic songs. All these people lived both in the world and beyond the world, combining these two seemingly contradictory modes of being.

Buddha was illumined, but he did not stop acting in the world. He is usually depicted sitting in padmasana or sometimes lying on one side. But this does not mean that he remained motionless like a corpse after his illumination under the bodhi tree in Gaya. Had he done this then the system of Buddhism would never have arisen. His compassion compelled him to teach. Furthermore, he urged his disciples to teach the 'Dharma' to others; he instructed them to work for the good of man. Mohammed was a husband and a father with many duties. He was an active man, but amid his external activities, he expanded his inner knowledge. He was illumined in a cave on Mount Hira. He continued working, but combined his work with awareness, balancing the ida and pingala aspects of his being. Krishna and Rama were both active. In fact, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna urges Arjuna time and time again to know the meaning of action within inaction, to be totally

aware while acting with intensity. Krishna did not tell Arjuna to escape from the battlefield at Kurukshetra and go to the Himalayas to meditate and practise austerity. No, Arjuna was told to fight, but with awareness.

Ramana Maharshi was illumined and although he never did very much intense work, he taught and guided his disciples, working in the ashram that grew up around him, preparing food and so forth. Swami Sivananda was the same. He did not stop work, but continued to express himself in many different ways, from writing books to working in the ashram. Endless other examples could be given of other sages who continued to act in the world. There seem to be no exceptions, they all combined illumination with external work. They all worked in the world, but with awareness of the underlying nature of everything.

A point to remember is that illumined people can work in the world in a subtle way that is not obvious to gross understanding. Though a great sage may not appear to do very much physically, he may be expressing himself powerfully at more subtle levels. This applies to sages who seem to do a lot of work and those who don't.

All the sages that we have mentioned and the countless ones that we have not mentioned through lack of space, continued to work in the world. They integrated the realm of the phenomenal and relative (*samsara*) with the transcendental (*nirvana*). They combined the limited with the unlimited. They acted as a crossroad between the finite and the infinite, the temporal and the eternal. They balanced the inner with the outer, they balanced the ida with the pingala.

Zen Buddhism continually emphasizes this balance of the outer with the inner. The Zen masters strongly imply that spiritual life should be in the world of everyday events and they practised what they preached. This is perfectly illustrated by the following Zen story given in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps: "Hyakujo was a Chinese Zen master. He worked with his disciples even when he was eighty years of age. He would work in the garden, clean the ground and prune the trees. The disciples were not very happy to see the old master work so hard, but they knew that he would never stop. They decided to hide his tools. For three days the master took

no food. Then the disciples realized that he was angry and that they had better return the tools. As soon as the tools were returned the master again ate food. In the evening he told his disciples: 'No work, no food'."

Follow the example of these illumined sages. Don't reject work. Change your attitude to work, try to be more detached, renounce the fruits mentally and be aware, but don't stop. If you are lost and totally involved in external actions, as are most people, then take steps to unfold inner awareness (*ida*). Start to practise yoga. On the other hand, if you are excessively introverted with a tendency to brood about your problems and deficiencies, then we suggest that you try to take more interest in the outside world (*pingala*). Do intense one-pointed work, but try to be aware at the same time. The important thing is that there should be balance between the *ida* and *pingala*. Follow the example of the wise, for this is the way to open up your potential and understanding.

The right and left hand path of tantra

In tantra, much is said about the left hand path (*vama marga*) and the right hand path (*dakshina marga*). There are many misconceptions about these terms. It is often said that the left hand path is somehow decadent and immoral and the right hand path is preferable. This is a misunderstanding, because actually the left hand path is for those aspirants who are firmly established in spiritual life. It is the path for more advanced *sadhakas* and comes after they have trodden the right hand path.

It is commonly accepted that there are seven stages of *sadhana* on the path of tantra (sometimes nine are given). These are called *acharas* and represent progressively higher levels of understanding and practices associated with progress along the spiritual path. We will not describe these different *acharas* here, for this is not the purpose of this discussion. What we want to point out here is that four stages are included within the realm of *dakshina marga*. This is also called *pravritti marga*, the path of external action. Here, the emphasis is on the *pingala* principle, though *ida* is also developed. This is the path that most people in the world are treading.

In tantra, the aspirant on the *dakshina marga* is preparing for the higher stages where the mind is more receptive and able to pass

beyond the obstacle of *laya* that we discussed previously (refer to the heading entitled the 'Path of Darkness' and the 'Path of Light'). It is a path for those who are predominantly *tamasic* in nature. It is concerned mainly with outer action as a means to purify the mind of problems, phobias, neuroses, selfishness and so forth. Some inner awakening does occur but the emphasis is on *karma yoga*. It is concerned with initially harmonizing the mind and body. It is a combination of the *ida* and *pingala* paths, but with a strong emphasis on the *pingala* aspect. This allows the individual to recognize his more gross problems and to understand his relationship with other people so that he can eventually expand inner awareness.

A guru will usually make new disciples follow this *dakshina marga* and there are many well-known stories that illustrate the arduous life that a disciple must pass through. Those people who have read the biography of Milarepa will remember how his guru Marpa made him work day and night on many projects. His guru made him build houses and then destroy them when they were completed. Milarepa almost despaired. For many years Marpa refused to teach any of the traditional teachings and practices which Milarepa so ardently desired. Instead he made Milarepa work and work on so many seemingly useless projects. This is an extreme example of the right hand path.

There are also many Zen and Tao stories which illustrate this same path. For example, an aspirant goes to a sage and asks for instructions, initiation or whatever. For many years the sage makes the disciple clean the floors, work in the kitchen and many other tasks. Possibly, the sage does not teach the disciple even one conventional spiritual practice or give even one concrete, recognizable instruction. All the disciple does is work, work and work. This is the right hand path. It is the stage where the disciple removes his most obvious blocks. And what is most important during this period, awareness (the *sushumna*) starts to spontaneously awaken.

When an aspirant is sufficiently harmonized, then he can start to tread the *vama marga* – the left hand path. Actually a better name for the left hand path is the *vipareeta marga* (the reversed path) or the *nivritti marga* (the

path of ascent or return to the source). This indicates the stage in spiritual life where one is ready to awaken the inner awareness of the mind to a greater extent. Here the ida is given more emphasis, but one still follows the pingala path, the path of action. One starts to make greater progress in expanding inner awareness (ida) but while simultaneously balancing this with karma yoga (pingala). The left hand path of tantra consists of three *acharas* or stages and are generally associated with a guru-disciple relationship. It is this *vama marga* that leads eventually to higher understanding and realization of one's fullest potential. It is this path that eventually leads to that which is beyond both the ida and pingala – the *sushumna* flow to *sahasrara*.

Here in tantra you will see that the balance of ida and pingala is implied. This applies throughout all the stages, from the progressive transition from the right hand path to the left hand path. The system of tantra is really a science. It is exact in its methods and sure of its aim. It has been tested and developed over the last few thousands of years by countless sages. It is for this reason that it brings results.

Ida and pingala in other systems

Don't make the mistake of assuming that the symbology of ida and pingala is confined to yoga and Indian mysticism. The ida-pingala principle represents a universal truth. It is therefore a part of every spiritual system in some form. Often the same idea of balance is conveyed by completely different symbols, but usually the symbology is strikingly similar.

Many ancient systems depict the route of spiritual life as a path or series of steps. Often the moon (ida) is shown in one corner and the sun (pingala) in the other. Sometimes spiritual life is depicted as a winding path which ascends the side of a high mountain. Again, the sun and the moon are shown. The mountain is symbolic of the *sushumna*. This symbology is very common in medieval European secret or mystical societies.

The cross in Christianity has many meanings, but surely one of them implies balance. All opposites are harmonized and equalized at the centre. Furthermore, if you use a little imagination, you can see that the cross is really very similar to the yogic symbol for ida, pingala and *sushumna*. The left side of the cross is ida,

the right side pingala and the vertical line or post is *sushumna*. Their meeting point is *ajna chakra*. The upper line or *sushumna* continues on to the *sahasrara* (oneness). At the crossing point, in the middle of the cross (*ajna*) there is no ego. It was on the cross that Christ was crucified, meaning that he lost his sense of ego, which he sacrificed at the centre. There are many meanings hidden in the cross and this is just one of them.

Those people who are familiar with the tarot cards will remember that some of the cards show two pillars on each side of the pictures, these include 'the Pope', 'the hanged man' and so forth. The two pillars are ida and pingala. They imply that balance in all aspects of life is necessary for spiritual life. Also many of the cards depict the sun and moon, again indicating the ida and pingala aspects of spiritual life.

Alchemical pictures are particularly notable for their clear illustrations of ida and pingala. Like yogic symbolism, ida is often represented by the moon and pingala by the sun. Other symbols are also used, such as the phoenix, the deer, the lion and so forth, with various meanings, but always the emphasis is on balance. The nocturnal world (internal knowledge) is shown merging with the sunlight world (external expression). All seemingly irreconcilable opposites are shown unified. This harmony and integration of opposites leads to regeneration or transmutation of the individual into higher states of receptivity and being. This regeneration of man is called the philosopher's stone, where his whole nature is refined so that it shines with dazzling luminosity. The average person is like an uncut diamond, dull and lustreless. When the diamond is cut and polished it radiates knowledge and bliss. This arises when the ida is balanced by the pingala at all levels of being.

Many of you have heard of the Goat of Mendes, also known as Baphomet. This is a very evocative mythical figure that tends to induce strange sensations in the psyche of many people. It is a hermaphrodite figure of human form with a goat's head. It symbolizes transcendental magic. Pictures of Baphomet show a black moon in the bottom left hand corner, with Baphomet's arm pointing downwards. The black moon symbolizes the ida path used for selfish purposes. The pointing arm

indicates that the misuse of psychic powers, such as in black magic, will eventually lead to a downfall and adverse personal repercussions. It seems that all people who tread the ida path for selfish reasons have a tendency to crash and pay the penalty. If you care to read *The Occult*, a book by Colin Wilson, you will be firmly convinced of this fact. All the famous occultists whom he mentions suffered through misuse of their powers. They rarely find happiness in life.

The other hand of the Baphomet points upwards to a white moon in the top right hand corner. This shows that the path of ida can lead to spiritual ascension, if psychic powers are not used for selfish purposes.

The ida and pingala pathways are also shown in pictures of Baphomet. But they are only depicted rising from mooladhara chakra through swadhisthana to manipura chakra. They ascend no further. This is open to many interpretations. In the context of the diagram we understand this as meaning that selfishness in outer activities (pingala) or in inner psychic abilities (ida) will prevent the individual rising above the level of understanding represented by the manipura chakra. You may possibly have a better interpretation.

Hermes was the ancient Egyptian personification of wisdom. He is also associated with Hermes Trismegistus who is believed to have originated the science of alchemy. There is much confusion between history and myth, but this doesn't concern us here. Hermes is usually depicted holding a unique rod in one hand, with two wings at the top end and entwined with two serpents. This is called a *caduceus* and is illustrated on the right hand side of the diagram under the heading entitled 'Symbolism of Ida and Pingala' in part 1 of this discussion'. This symbol is no other than the ida, pingala and sushumna of yoga. If you count the number of intersections of the two serpents you will find that there are six. These represent the junction of ida and pingala at each of the six chakras from mooladhara to ajna. The two wings at the top of the caduceus are the exact equivalent of the two lotus petals that symbolize ajna chakra in yoga, the highest chakra where ida and pingala merge to become one. This mystical symbol is the exact equivalent of ida, pingala and sushumna of India.

Incidentally, this caduceus is the official symbol of the medical profession. In this

context it is called the *Staff of Aesculapius* (the wand of Hermes and Mercury). This may seem a little fanciful but actually the adoption of this symbol is perfectly logical. Medicine is concerned with balance, for it is imbalance that causes disease. Balance means good health while imbalance implies illness or bad health. This balance or lack of balance applies at all levels of subtlety; it is directly associated with ida and pingala. Illness can be caused by physical, pranic and mental imbalance. In a wider sense, illness is caused by spiritual imbalance. In the extreme sense, we can say that only a person who has achieved the highest stage of spiritual life, unitive life, is truly healthy. The balance of ida and pingala is the prime concern of any system of healing, including medicine, which is why the caduceus is used as the symbol of medical science.

The ancient Egyptian worship of Isis, the gnostic system of Abraxas and many other old systems were very concerned with the balance of ida and pingala. This is very clear from the surviving symbols of these ancient cults. The same applies to systems that are still active, such as the Rosicrucians and Freemasons – balance of opposites is of prime importance.

In the story of Genesis in the *Bible* mention is made of the tree of good and evil and the tree of life. This is open to many different interpretations, but we see the tree of good and evil to be the ida and pingala, the tree of life being the sushumna. This is confirmed by the fact that the cult of ancient Persia, the cult of Mithra, had a similar symbol. It is widely accepted that much of the *Bible* was influenced by this Persian cult, or conversely that the system of Mithra was influenced by the Old Testament. There is a well-known symbol of Mithra where two snakes – good (*ahura mazda*) and evil (*ahriman*) – face each other and devour the cosmic egg. The egg is in the mouth of each snake. The egg represents perfect harmony at the highest level – sahasrara. These two snakes and the tree of good and evil in the *Bible*, represent the ida and pingala, the opposing forces or aspects of existence. When the egg is consumed by the ida and pingala snakes then there is perfect fusion in the sahasrara, where all opposites are resolved.

This idea of balance is common to every spiritual system. It is symbolized in many different ways. We have only given the examples

that are obviously very similar to the ida-pingala symbol. There are innumerable other symbols that say the same thing in a different way. An obvious example is the yin-yang symbol of China – the t'ai chi. This is also shown in the previously mentioned diagram in part 1¹. It has basically the same meaning as ida-pingala. Yin is female and earthly, while yang is male and heavenly. They represent opposite forces or aspects at all levels from the physical to the more subtle, from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic. There is nothing that does not come under their influence. Ida and pingala can be applied to everything. The same is true of yin and yang. Harmony between them leads to health and implies that one's inner being is perfectly in tune with the outside world; disharmony means illness, unhappiness and disequilibrium in one's being and relationship with the outside world. When there is harmony and balance of ida and pingala at the highest level, one blends with the sahasrara (oneness). When there is harmony and balance of yin and yang then the result is Tao. Both are beautiful, expressive symbols crossing language boundaries and time. They apply to everyone in any race, place and era. Moreover, words can so easily be misunderstood and corrupted but symbols retain the purity of the meaning, for they only reveal themselves when one is ready to understand.

Ida and pingala implications in summary

We have defined the meaning and implications of ida and pingala along a few basic lines. But actually, if you care to think about it, you will find that the ida-pingala principle applies to all aspects of life. It implies moderation in all activities – in food, between work and play, between mental and physical activities. It implies a balance between passivity and dynamism, ambition and no ambition, between sleep and wakefulness, like and dislike, effort and no effort, victory and defeat and between considering that things matter and that they don't matter. One's whole life should be lived according to the principle of ida and pingala balance. This principle is not merely a useless philosophical concept; it is an indicator, a guideline for living one's whole life in a harmonious manner. It points out that one should live right in the centre, untouched by opposites.

In spiritual life there should be a continual process of adjustment. The awareness of the inner world is expanded and from this the relationships and understanding of the outside world are adjusted. It is a continual process of synchronizing the ida and pingala principles so that they are always balanced. But this balance point should slowly rise so that one's being progressively passes through the ascending chakras. The ida (inner awareness) is matched with the pingala (outer awareness and expression) so that they balance each other at each of the chakras in turn. This is the spiritual path.

The path of spiritual life should not, and cannot, be a selfish thing. Though you may be treading the spiritual path as an individual, it really includes everyone and everything else. If you are seeking spiritual awakening for purely personal motives, then this is an immediate block – it does not fit. It is like trying to be part of a family, or a member of a club, or working in an office, without the slightest consideration of others. It cannot be done. If you live in a family, then you can only be a perfect and integrated member by harmonizing your inner being and simultaneously having concern for other members of the family. It is the same with the spiritual path, when done for personal motives it is immediately self-defeating. There has to be the aspiration for self-perfection combined with interest in the welfare of all other people and things. This is implied in the balance of ida and pingala; it is the balance between inner knowledge and external expression. This is the middle path. There has to be regard for oneself and others. This is essential.

The aim is to maintain awareness (sushumna) while conducting the affairs of the world. In a sense, there has to be perfect balance between sleep and wakefulness. This is called *yoga nidra* (sleepless sleep); one should be asleep to the world while acting perfectly in it, but awake to the realm of consciousness. This is action in inaction, the union of Shiva and Shakti. It is not easy, but this is the aim.

Finally, we can say that the balance of ida and pingala implies equanimity . . . equanimity in all spheres of being.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

The Ida and Pingala Balance

We have written much on all aspects of ida and pingala in the topic entitled 'The Balance of Life'¹. Here we want to describe simple yet effective techniques for balancing ida and pingala in pranayama and before meditation practices. These techniques are important, for when there is balance of ida and pingala, then one will gain the most out of the yogic practices.

Many people think that in meditation practices one only needs to sit and close the eyes, and one will be instantly transported to the realms of bliss. But this is most unlikely. Mere closing of the eyes, even in padmasana, will probably at the most lead to a little peace, a psychic movie show, but more likely a deep sleep. There should be balance between the ida and pingala before starting meditation practices.

Sushumna, ida, pingala and meditation

Why is this balance of ida and pingala so important in relation to meditation techniques? The answer is simple: so that one's being functions on the path of sushumna².

Ida and pingala both indicate the realm of time. That is, they represent the inner psychic realms and the outer world respectively, both of which are under the sway of time. Meditation is concerned with the timeless and therefore the ida and pingala should be balanced. In this way, the kundalini is able to flow up the sushumna and one enters the realm of timelessness. In the scriptures it is said that the kundalini is the devourer of time: "One should control the sun (pingala) and moon (ida) because these are the day and night of time; the secret is that the sushumna (the passage of the kundalini) is the eater of time." (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:17) That is, when the ida and pingala are balanced in all senses, then time is dissolved.

Meditation practices are concerned with resolving dualities. Balance of the ida and pingala implies a degree of resolution of

duality; in fact balance of the ida and pingala throughout the entire spectrum of the chakras implies total non-duality, which is the aim of spiritual aspiration. Balance of the ida and pingala, by reducing the feeling of duality, leads to the opening up of the sushumna which is the direct line to sahasrara. Though very basic and simple, the techniques that we will shortly explain help to break down all differences between the inner and outer, bad and good, etc. This is the sushumna path that is necessary for success in meditation practices. This is clearly stated in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "One should think neither of the outside world nor the internal world; in fact one should not think any thoughts." (4:57)

This thoughtlessness can only arise when the ida and pingala are balanced. This is why ida and pingala are so relevant to meditation practices. This fact has been illustrated beautifully in the following story: "There were two birds, one black and one white. They were tied to a peg with two ropes. They constantly tried to fly away to freedom but were unable to do so because of the rope that secured them. Ultimately they became tired and slept peacefully near the peg."

These two birds represent the ida and pingala; they correspond to the flow of breath in the left and right nostril respectively. The alternate functioning of the ida and pingala prevents one moving into higher awareness. So long as they operate there will be no success in yogic practices. It is only when the two birds (ida and pingala) are tired and they retire to the centre that sushumna awakens and meditation arises.

Biorhythms

Women and men follow a monthly rhythm. With women it is associated with the menstrual cycle and changes of mood. With men it is associated mainly with a fluctuation of mood. There is also a twenty-four hour rhythm which

induces changes in hormone secretion, blood pressure, body heat and so forth.

Modern scientists have now begun to realize that there is also a 90-minute rhythm. They have called it the *ultradian* rhythm and it relates to periodic swings of mood, mental alertness, stomach contractions and many other physical and mental changes. This last rhythm is directly related to ida and pingala and it is manipulation of this rhythm in order to induce meditation that is the main aim of hatha yoga and the practices that we will shortly describe.

Ida, pingala and the air flow in the nostrils

There is a direct relationship between the ida and pingala and the air flow through the two nostrils. The *Rudra Yamala Tantra* states: "On the left and right side of the sushumna are the ida and pingala. These go straight upwards, alternating from left to right. Having pierced all the chakras (the main ones in the spinal region) they proceed to the nostrils."

It is because of this relationship that one can manipulate the flow of breath through the nostrils in order to bring balance in the ida and pingala at more subtle levels. On a gross level, the ida and pingala correspond to the breath in the left and right nostril respectively. This gross aspect has a direct relationship with the more subtle realms of ida and pingala in the mind and pranic body. Thus gross manipulation of the breath flowing through the nostrils has vast repercussions on a more subtle level of one's being. This is the basis for most standard hatha yoga practices that attempt to control ida and pingala. The other forms of yoga attempt to gain the same control at more subtle levels without physical means.

Balancing the air flows in the nostrils

The ideal condition for meditative practice occurs when the flow of air in each nostril is the same. This balance arises when the predominance of flow in the left nostril changes over to predominance in the right nostril or vice versa. This changeover occurs periodically in accordance with the ultradian rhythm that we discussed briefly. This cycle is said to repeat itself every 90 minutes, but in fact there are many other factors involved which tend to greatly modify it, making it shorter or longer and subject to extreme variability. This varia-

tion or fluctuation is especially noticeable with people who live in busy towns and cities who are subjected to a continuous stream of external stimuli and social pressures. The rhythm tends to be more constant and nearer the 90-minute cycle with people living closer to nature in villages and the quieter parts of the world.

The best time for meditative practices occurs naturally for a few minutes throughout the day and night, when the ida breath flow changes over to the pingala breath flow or vice versa. But most people never notice this changeover because they are too busy. Therefore, they rarely take the perfect opportunity to use this short period of time to become aware of their being. This does not mean that you will automatically start to meditate at this period; it means that this is the ideal condition under which one's being, is most receptive to the meditative state – pure awareness.

In nadi shodhana pranayama and other yogic practices, the two breath flows are artificially rendered equal, helping to induce the ideal situation for meditation. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the two breath flows be balanced before attempting any meditative techniques. Under this condition there is a balance between wakefulness to the outside world and total absorption or sleep in the inner psychic world of the mind.

PRACTICES OF HATHA YOGA

Probably you already know most of the following techniques. In fact, the asanas and pranayama are almost certainly an integral part of your daily practice program. But it is more than possible that you don't realize that these simple techniques are intended to balance ida and pingala. Actually, all hatha yoga practices are intended to balance ida and pingala, but it is the following ones that do it most directly and obviously.

Technique 1: Padadhiraana

In English, this asana can be called the 'breath balancing pose'. It is very simple, yet it is most effective in balancing the ida and pingala flows before starting pranayama practice.

Any method that applies pressure under the armpits has a direct influence on the flow of breath through the nostrils. If you don't believe this, then try it for yourself. If firm pressure is

applied under the right armpit, then the left nostril will tend to flow. If a firm pressure is applied under the left armpit, then the right nostril will tend to flow. This has been scientifically verified in laboratories, but you can quickly test it for yourself. Allow at least a minute or so before expecting any positive results, though changes may occur within a few seconds. The reason for this relationship between the nostrils and the armpits is not certain, but it is probably associated with nerve reflexes.



In padadhirasana, pressure is simultaneously applied under both armpits. This, not surprisingly, brings about a balance of the air flows through the right and the left nostrils. The technique requires little explanation and is as follows:

Sit in any comfortable pose; traditionally the asana is done in vajrasana as shown, but this is not essential³.

Cross the arms in front of the chest.

Place the right hand under the left armpit with the thumb upwards in front of the right shoulder.

Place the left hand under the right armpit in the same manner.

Close the eyes. This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Practise until the breath flows become equalized.

Throughout the practice be aware of the breathing process and try to imagine that the flows are equal; this will increase the efficacy of the asana.

Technique 2: Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

If you have been following the previous lessons then this practice will require little introduction – it has been a constant theme. All the four stages are directly concerned with balancing ida and pingala. It is the most direct approach, for the flow in the nostrils is controlled by physical manipulation of the nostrils.

We don't intend to explain the practice here, as this has already been done extensively. However, you may have forgotten much about the practice, therefore, the following is a brief reference guide to refresh your memory:

Stage 1⁴ and Stage 2⁵: These first two stages should be practised by beginners. They are excellent methods of bringing about balance in ida and pingala.

Stage 3⁶ and Stage 4⁷: The third and fourth stages are for more advanced practitioners and should not be done without first of all perfecting the first two stages.

Throughout this course we have emphasized that nadi shodhana pranayama is the ideal technique to practise before meditative practice. The reason is simple: it directly brings ida and pingala into balance.

Technique 3: Neti

The practices of jala neti and sutra neti are both very useful for balancing the breath flows in the two nostrils⁸. If you find that your nose is very blocked, then the best way to remove and to bring a degree of balance into the breath flows is to do either jala neti or sutra neti, or preferably both, one after the other. Jala neti will remove most of the gross mucus, while sutra neti will stimulate nerves within the nostrils to induce ida-pingala balance.

We suggest you try these two practices before you start your daily practice program, preferably before commencing pranayama practice, and note any improvement.

Technique 4: Yoga Danda

A traditional method of tantra is to use a special T-shaped method of crutch. In Hindi it is called a *kubadi*. The crutch is designed so that when a person is in a sitting position on the floor, the horizontal beam rests firmly under and supports the armpit with the bottom of the vertical pillar on the ground. It is usually made of wood, and if you are sufficiently interested then you can easily make one for yourself if you have a rudimentary knowledge of carpentry.

The yoga danda is used as follows:

1. If the left nostril flow is predominating, then the crutch is placed under the left armpit. This will pressurize that armpit and produce the same results explained in technique 1. In this case, after a short time, the right flow will become greater.
2. If the right nostril flow is predominating, then the crutch is obviously placed under the right armpit to induce a greater flow of the left nostril.

3. When one feels that the flows are reasonably equal, then the crutch can be placed in front of the body. Both elbows can be rested on the horizontal beam, with the arms folded or in any other suitable position. This will tend to induce perfect balance of the ida and pingala air flows for the following pranayama or meditation practices.

This practice is really a refinement of the padadhirasana (described in technique 1). In padadhirasana there is a tendency for the arms to become tired after a short period of time. The yoga danda can be used to bring about the same results for a long period of time without any tendency to become fatigued.

Technique 5: Anuloma Viloma

This technique is an excellent method that is normally classified as a meditation technique⁹. It brings balance of ida and pingala through mental suggestion. One imagines that the breath flows alternately through the two nostrils in turn. At first they will probably be unequal, but after some time the mental suggestion and imagination will bring about the change physically. At the same time, the practice will induce deep states of relaxation, but without being lost in a stream of thoughts and psychic pictures. This is a simple practice that has a notable feature compared to most other meditative techniques; while inducing relaxation, it simultaneously brings balance between ida and pingala, so that one does not become lost in thoughts or sleep. The very mechanics of the practice is such that ida and pingala are automatically balanced.

Technique 6: Ida and Pingala Shuddhi

These two practices are very similar to anuloma viloma; in fact, they supplement one another.

Ida shuddhi (purification of ida nadi) is a simple method of increasing the flow of breath through the left nostril. The method is as follows:

Sit in a comfortable pose. Close the eyes.

Imagine and feel the breath flowing in and out through the left nostril.

Synchronize the mantra Aum with both inhalation and exhalation.

Continue for about 5 minutes; or if you wish you can count the number of breaths from 108 down to 0.

Pingala shuddhi (purification of pingala nadi) increases the breath flow through the right nostril. All details are the same as given for ida shuddhi, except one must imagine that the breath is flowing through the right nostril instead of the left nostril.

Both of these techniques can be used to increase the breath flow in one nostril in order to induce balance. Ideally, these two practices are done one after another prior to practising anuloma viloma, in order to increase sensitivity to the breath flows through the nostrils.

Technique 7: Asanas in general

Asanas in general will tend to balance ida and pingala, especially if they are done in a systematic manner, correctly, and as a part of a regular practice program. This is not really surprising, since most asanas have a symmetrical influence on all parts of the body. Most tend to apply an equal pressure on the armpits. Also, if asanas are done correctly, then one will keep the eyes closed and fixed on the breath, an inner symbol or any other suitable object of attention which includes introversion, the flow of ida. But at the same time there must be a degree of extroversion in order to execute and maintain the physical position of the asana; in this manner, the pingala aspect is also simultaneously included. This tends to develop balance of ida and pingala, without too much extroversion or conversely too much absorption in mental and psychic fantasies. It is for this reason that asanas, when perfected, are indeed meditative techniques. This is one reason why asanas are so useful in bringing about good health – a factor that is usually overlooked when trying to explain how asanas bring about benefits.

Technique 8: Adjustment of lying position

As we have already explained, pressure under the right armpit will induce flow of breath through the left nostril, while pressure under the left armpit will induce flow through the right nostril. In the same way and for the same reasons, the right nostril will tend to flow if one lies on the left side of the body, while the left nostril will flow if one lies on the right side of the body. Again you can test the truth of this statement for yourself.

This technique can be used before sleep or while practising any meditation technique

in the lying pose, for they have many subtle effects apart from those which are noticeably physical.

Technique 9: Physical blockage of the nose

An obvious method of changing breath flows is to put a piece of cotton wool or any other suitable material in one of the nostrils. That is, to induce flow in the right nostril the left nostril should be blocked, and conversely, to induce the flow of breath in the left nostril, the right nostril must be blocked. If you wish you can try this method, but we recommend any of the other methods as preferable, since they are less forceful. We certainly are not suggesting that you block both nostrils as a means to balance ida and pingala!

Warning

We don't want you to tamper with breath flows of the ida and pingala during the day or night apart from during your yoga practices. Of course, most of us are too busy to concern ourselves with these flows during everyday duties, but we are giving you a warning just in case you are one of the few people who have a lot of spare time. The body and mind automatically adjust the ida and pingala breath flows to that which is required for the prevailing situation.

For example, at night there is a tendency for the body to lie in the position that encourages the correct flow, either of ida or pingala. The body is a very sensitive instrument, though few people realize this fact. If the ida needs to flow then automatically there is the tendency to lie on the right side; if the pingala needs to flow then there is the tendency to lie on the left side. This is one of the reasons why people continually change their sleeping position during the night. Your body has a built-in sense – don't interfere with its natural functioning during the day and night; let it follow its own dictates.

But, immediately before meditative practices and during yogic practices in general, it is justified to manipulate the flows to obtain balance. This is a temporary interference with the body; any of the techniques that we have described can be used. For the rest of the day, you should let the ida and pingala flows follow their own laws.

General advice

We have described these practices since they are an important part of hatha yoga. They quickly help to balance ida and pingala as a means to gain the most out of one's meditation practices. Of course, balancing the breath flows through the nostrils is most unlikely to balance ida and pingala at all levels rising up to ajna chakra, but at the same time it is a great help.

It is not necessary to do all the techniques that we have described; merely one or two of your own choice. If you are already doing a full program of asanas and pranayama every day before meditation practice then it is probably not necessary to use any of the more specific techniques that we have outlined. Only use one of these methods if you feel it is justified in your particular situation. You must use your own discretion and common sense in this respect.

Kriya yoga and ida-pingala balance

Probably the most powerful method of balancing ida and pingala is kriya yoga. The individual techniques are carefully arranged so that they bring ida and pingala into balance. In the first kriyas great care is taken to keep the awareness balanced between the internal realm of the mind and the external realm of the material world. The first kriyas are primarily concerned with fixing awareness between the devil and the deep blue sea, the razor's edge between extroversion on the one hand and introversion on the other hand. This will be more fully explained in Book III when we outline in detail the different kriya practices and their effects on the body and mind.

Notes

¹ Balance of Life: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

² For detailed explanations of the meaning and implications of the sushumna refer to Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

³ Vajrasana – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

⁵ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5; Book I Lesson 5, Topic 4

⁶ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 4

⁷ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 4

⁸ Jala neti – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2; Sutra neti – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 3

⁹ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 5

Vishuddhi Chakra

In the last four lessons we have described the following chakras:

1. mooladhara¹
2. swadhisthana²
3. manipura³
4. anahata⁴

The first two are generally associated with the attributes of *tamas*. The third and fourth chakras are associated with the qualities of *rajas*. In this topic we will introduce the first of the *sattwic* chakras, the *vishuddhi chakra*. The word *sattwa* means purity, understanding, peace and other qualities that lead to and are an expression of both inner harmony and harmonious interactions with other people and the outside world in general.

Vishuddhi chakra is located in the throat region and comes immediately above the *anahata chakra* in the ascending order of the chakras.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *vishuddhi* means 'purification', therefore this chakra is usually translated as 'the purification centre'. It is the centre that purifies and harmonizes all opposites. It is also called *vishuddhikaya chakra* which has the same meaning. This chakra is also widely called 'the centre of nectar' because it is the level of being where poison and nectar, good and bad, are united into a common experience of bliss.

Vishuddhi chakra is sometimes called the *bharati sthana* – the centre of speech, because of its location in the throat region. *Bharati* is the goddess of speech.

Mythology

There is a beautiful story in the Indian scriptures that clearly illustrates the process of the *vishuddhi*. The story is as follows:

It is said that in the primordial past, the *suras* and *asuras* were continually fighting each other. The *suras* are beings that represent the forces of good and light in the world and

within each individual. These are the forces which help a person to overcome all obstacles and tread the spiritual path. In Christianity the equivalent would be angels; other religions have other names for them and for the opposite tendencies which lead to ignorance or tie a person to low levels of understanding. These are the forces that act as obstacles on the spiritual path. They can be roughly translated as demons or devils. These two forces can be understood and interpreted in many ways, and on many different levels of subtlety, but we leave this to the reader. Let us return to the story.

Both the *suras* and *asuras* tried to dominate and destroy each other. Eventually Vishnu tried to resolve the conflict by suggesting that they stir up the primordial ocean (called the ocean of milk representing the world and the mind) and equally divide the contents between them. This seemed to be a fair solution and Vishnu's plan was adopted. The primordial ocean was stirred up and many things arose to the surface for sharing and distribution.

Everyone was very happy until a gruesome poison rose up to the surface. Neither the *suras* nor the *asuras* wanted it, but they could not throw the poison away because it would cause harm. There seemed to be a dilemma. Eventually Vishnu approached Shiva who was in deep meditation and asked his advice. Shiva merely picked up the poison and drank it in one gulp. It caused him absolutely no harm. Because of this action Shiva is widely known as *nilakantha* – blue throated, where blue refers to poison.

This action is very symbolic and very meaningful. It indicates that at higher levels of awareness or meditation, at and above the level of *vishuddhi chakra*, even poison (the negative aspects of existence – bad, evil, war, destruction, etc.) can be integrated as part of a whole. All aspects of existence, whether poison or nectar, are part of the total scheme



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Vishuddhi

of being. When a person functions at the level of the vishuddhi chakra and above, then all concepts of good and bad fall away. They are seen in a higher light, from a wider viewpoint. Thus Shiva, because of his elevated state of being, was able to absorb even the poisonous aspects and experiences of life and transform them into a source of bliss.

Incidentally, there is also a bird in India called the nilakantha because of its blue throat (in English it is called the blue jay). Also the peacock is often associated with the ability to absorb poison and transform it into nectar. The peacock can eat almost anything without harming itself. This also applies to the yogi whose level of being is at the vishuddhi chakra; all experiences, good or bad, are sources of bliss. Everything becomes nectar – blissful.

Nectar and bindu

It is said that a divine fluid flows and cascades downwards from a higher point called *bindu* to vishuddhi. This fluid is symbolic and represents *satchidananda* (truth, consciousness and bliss) which originates in the sahasrara, the source of all being, but manifests through bindu⁵. Bindu can be considered as a gateway between sahasrara and individual existence – the gateway between the infinite and finite.

This divine fluid has many different names. In English it can be called *ambrosia* – the food of the gods; the elixir of life. It is widely called *amrita* – the nectar of immortality. In the Vedas it is known as *soma* (nectar); in the Tantras it is called *madya* (divine wine). Many Sufi poets refer to the 'sweet wine' which brings instant satisfaction; they are not talking about the wine made from grapes, but the wine of bliss. The wine used in Christian ceremonies also symbolizes the same bliss; exoterically it represents the blood of Christ, but really it refers to the blissful nature that was the essence of Christ and is the essence of all beings. In the *Bible* Christ says: "But whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14) This is not ordinary water; it is the divine fluid of bliss that descends from bindu to vishuddhi chakra.

Every religious system and every system concerned with opening up the potential contained within each being has its own

symbolism for the unspeakable feeling of bliss. The meaning is the same.

Lalana chakra

The *lalana chakra* is a minor chakra that is closely associated with the vishuddhi chakra. It is located in the root of the palate at the back of the mouth. It is this centre that is referred to in the following quotation from the *Bible*: "But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . . (Judges 15:19) Again, the water is not the liquid water, but bliss.

After the nectar leaves the bindu, it is stored in the lalana chakra before reaching vishuddhi chakra. Lalana chakra is sometimes called the *kala chakra* – the centre of division, because it is the centre where the nectar from bindu divides into either good or bad experiences in life. When vishuddhi chakra, combined with lalana chakra, is not awakened, life tends to be painful and unhappy. The nectar becomes poison. But when the vishuddhi and lalana chakras are awakened, then the nectar remains in the form of bliss. Life becomes a source of joyful experiences. Such is the importance of the vishuddhi-lalana chakras.

Incidentally, the purpose of the well known practice of khechari mudra is to stimulate and awaken this lalana chakra⁶. Though it is a physical technique it induces more subtle changes on a psychic level.

Attributes of vishuddhi

This is the centre or level of awareness where the world begins to become like one's own home. One becomes open to all experiences, whether good or bad. The stage of the world and life in general is regarded as the provider of experiences that lead to greater understanding. Instead of fighting with life, one begins to flow with the current of life. One ceases to continually avoid or ignore bad experiences or facets of life and seek good experiences. Instead there is the tendency to let things happen in the way that they must. The nectar and the poison are both consumed. Everything and everyone becomes magical. Instead of feeling neurotic and antagonistic towards the world and other people, one begins to relax and flow with all situations. One begins to tune in with other people.

More and more, one will see sense and intelligence behind all things and actions. This is the centre where all people and all things are seen as a cosmic whole, with everything working in harmony with everything else.

It is said that below vishuddhi it is possible to fall and lose one's level of harmony and understanding. At the level of vishuddhi and above, this possibility of fall no longer exists. It is the chakra that lies on the threshold of spiritual realization and higher knowledge. In the *Shat Chakra Nirupana* it says: "This chakra (vishuddhi) is the gateway to liberation for he who wishes to know the real meaning of yoga and whose senses are purified and controlled." (verse 30) It is said that a person who opens vishuddhi chakra knows all the scriptures without needing to read them. That is, a person at this level of understanding comprehends the meaning behind the scriptures through his own experience and intuition. He becomes compassionate, peaceful and full of bliss.

Symbolism

The vishuddhi chakra is symbolized by a purple lotus flower with sixteen petals. Traditionally, each of these petals is inscribed with one of the sixteen Sanskrit vowels – Am अं, Aam आं, Im इं, Eem ईं, Um उं, Uum ऊं, Rim रं, Reem रं, Lrim लं, Lreem लं, Em एं, Aim ऐं, Om ओं, Aum औं, M' and Ah ः. We have omitted these letters in our symbolic diagram of the chakra.

In the centre of the lotus flower is a white circle in which there is a drop of nectar; one drop among many drops that stream down from bindu to vishuddhi. In the drop is inscribed the bija (seed) mantra for the vishuddhi chakra – Ham ह्रं. Many traditional diagrams also portray a white elephant and various deities. We have omitted these for simplicity and also so that the diagram is not confined to one religious system. Most of the traditional deities have little symbolic value for most people outside India.

Location of chakra and kshetram

Like swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras, vishuddhi chakra also has a reflection on the front surface of the body called the *vishuddhi kshetram*. This is used in the practices of kriya yoga.

The positions of the chakra and kshetram are as follows:

Vishuddhi kshetram is located on the front surface of the throat in the region of the Adam's apple and the thyroid gland.

Vishuddhi chakra is located in the spine directly behind the kshetram.

The kshetram can be easily located for it is pin-pointed by the bump or protrusion at the throat. The chakra is more difficult to locate. We suggest that you look in a mirror, place one finger on the Adam's apple and use a finger of the other hand to locate the region of the spine that is directly behind the Adam's apple. Eventually you should be able to feel the exact location with the eyes closed, but a little practice is required. This is the purpose of the following simple practice.

PRACTICES

Vishuddhi Shuddhi

The following practice is very simple. *Vishuddhi shuddhi* – 'the purification of the vishuddhi'.

Sit in a comfortable position.

Hold the back straight and close the eyes.

Become aware of the breath.

Fold your tongue back into khechari mudra⁶.

Do ujjayi pranayama⁶.

For a minute or so be aware of the sound of the breath at the throat.

Let your breathing become slower and deeper.

Then with inhalation, imagine that the breath is being drawn in through the vishuddhi kshetram at the front of the throat.

Feel that the breath passes through the kshetram and eventually pierces vishuddhi chakra in the spine.

With exhalation, feel the breath move forwards from vishuddhi chakra trigger point towards the kshetram and eventually outwards in front of the body.

This is 1 round.

Continue for at least 5 minutes or longer, if you have time available.

Daily practice in this manner will gradually develop your sensitivity to vishuddhi chakra and kshetram.

Location of the other chakras and kshetrams

Besides the practice that we have just described for vishuddhi, you should also continue to do practices that increase your sensitivity to mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata chakras and kshetrams. This will

maximize your sensitivity for kriya yoga practices to be introduced in Book III.

If you can easily locate the other chakras and kshetrams then you should practise the method of chakra shuddhi⁴. That is, you have to chant Aum in time with the pulse 21 times at each of the chakras and kshetrams. Preferably you should also use a mala, since this will be a valuable preparation for kriya yoga practices.

If you have difficulty in locating the centres then continue to practise the specific techniques prescribed for each centre in the previous four lessons.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3

⁴ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

⁵ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5

⁶ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 4)

Nowadays there is an overwhelming tendency for human endeavour to be completely absorbed in the outside world. Everything in society, in education and so forth is orientated towards outside aspiration and activity. In fact, any tendency to be introverted is widely regarded as abnormal. The direction of man's life is almost totally fixed on the pingala path. This results in disequilibrium in life because the pingala is not supplemented and balanced by the ida path of introspection. This is one of the main reasons for so much mental turmoil and dissatisfaction in the world today. Attention is continually directed outwards, so that one never knows the nature of the inner world. And balance between the inner and outer realms, ida and pingala is essential in order to find spiritual bliss and knowledge.

The whole aim of yoga is to find this balance between ida and pingala. Many methods are used. One of the simplest yet most effective is ajapa. Continuous practise of ajapa puts you in tune with the breath and the associated mantra. The breath is a continual reminder that you must be aware of yourself in relation to the outer and inner world. And while you are alive, the breath never stops. It is therefore the continual reminder. If you use it, it will make you more harmonized and sensitive. You will attain perfect balance between excessive introversion and excessive extroversion; you will find there is a balance between becoming totally lost in the outside world of material objects and becoming totally lost in the inner world of fascinating psychic events. Perfect balance of ida and pingala implies that the sushumna functions. This leads directly to meditation.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 4

Technique

In stage 1 we merged the mantra *Soham* with the breath¹. In stage 2 the mantra *Hamso* was merged with the breathing process². In stage

3 the mantra was split into separate parts *So* and *Ham* which were individually synchronized with respiration³. In stage 4, to be described shortly, *So* and *Ham* will be merged with the breathing process so that they form a continuous cycle . . . *So-Ham-So-Ham-So* and so forth. The sound of *So* should merge with *Ham* so that there is no break in the cycle. Before *So* ends, *Ham* should start and before *Ham* ends, *So* should start. If you have done the previous three stages you will find that this fourth stage comes naturally. If you have not done the preparatory stages then you will find stage 4 difficult if not impossible.

The technique of stage 4 is as follows:

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close your eyes.

Relax the whole body and adjust yourself so that you feel no need to move.

A good preparatory practice is *kaya sthairyam*⁴.

Do *khechari mudra* and *ujjayi pranayama*⁵.

Become aware of the breathing process.

Make the breathing longer and deeper.

Maintain complete attention on the breath.

It is most important to know that you are doing the practice.

Know that the breathing process is taking place.

After a few minutes feel the breath moving between navel and throat.

Inhalation ascending from the navel to the throat.

Exhalation descending from throat to navel.

Be totally aware of the breathing process; this is essential.

After a few minutes synchronize the sound *So* with inhalation and *Ham* with exhalation.

Let the mantra be an endless repetition: *So-Ham-So-Ham-So-Ham* . . .

So should merge with *Ham* and *Ham* should merge with *So*.

These two sounds should not be regarded as separate but as continuations of each other.

The last part of *So* joins with *Ham*.

The last part of *Ham* joins with *So*.

The *So* sounds on the upward cycle of breath from the navel; towards the end of the cycle before reaching the throat, the sound of *Ham* should begin.

The sound *Ham* occurs on the downward cycle of exhalation from the throat; towards the end of the cycle, just before the navel, the sound *So* should begin.

Halfway through *So* turn your attention to *Soham* and halfway through *Ham* turn your attention to *Hamso*.

In this manner, the mantra *Soham* becomes an unbroken sound . . . the mantra and breathing become a constant stream.

There should be no break.

Carry on in this manner for a few minutes, about 5 minutes.

Then practise chidakasha dharana⁶.

Watch the space in front of the closed eyes. Merely be a witness to whatever arises, if anything, on the mind screen.

After about 3 minutes, return to the practice of ajapa: awareness of the mantra and respiration.

After another 5 minutes, again repeat chidakasha dharana.

Continue to alternate between ajapa and chidakasha dharana for the duration of the time that you assigned for your practice.

Preparatory stages

The practice of the earlier stages 1, 2 and 3 is essential for mastery of stage 4. You may find that there is little difference between the 4 stages, but the difference, no matter how small, is very important. If you have not practised stages 1 to 3, we suggest that you spend at least two weeks doing each stage before attempting stage 4. If you don't do the preliminary stages then stage 4 will give little or no benefits.

Nadi Shodhana Pranayama

To gain the most benefits out of ajapa we suggest that you firstly practise nadi shodhana pranayama. This not only brings about deep relaxation of the mind and body, but intensifies the awareness of the breathing process.

Psychic passage

In this lesson we have given instructions for the location of the vishuddhi chakra and

its reflection⁷. In previous lessons we have given instructions regarding the location of the manipura and anahata chakras and their reflections⁸. This means that you are now ready to imagine that there is a psychic passage between the manipura reflection (manipura kshetram) at the navel and the reflection of vishuddhi chakra (vishuddhi kshetram) at the front of the throat. The passage will also pass through the anahata kshetram.

In ajapa stage 4 you should feel that the breath and the mantra are ascending and descending within this psychic passage. You should feel the inhaled breath being drawn up from manipura kshetram, piercing anahata kshetram and ending at vishuddhi kshetram. The exhaled breath should move downwards, be pushed downwards, in a similar manner.

This modification of the practice relates directly to kriya yoga.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

⁵ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁶ For full details of chidakasha refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

⁷ Topic 3 of this lesson

⁸ Manipura chakra – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3
Anahata chakra – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have spent much space describing the implications of ida and pingala. These two simple principles represent the essence of spiritual life and aspiration. The techniques that we have given for physical control of ida and pingala will not balance ida and pingala at all levels. At most they will only balance the grosser levels, but they are nevertheless a great help in improving the quality of your meditative practices.

We therefore suggest that you familiarize yourself with the hatha yoga techniques for balancing ida and pingala and use one or two of them in your daily program. If you practise nadi shodhana every day then this is probably more than enough to meet your needs. Otherwise we suggest that you practise padadhirasana before your meditative prac-

tice, or if you have time you can integrate anuloma viloma into your meditative practice. Any of the other techniques can be adopted if the circumstances demand it.

If you have mastered ajapa stage 3 then you should now proceed to ajapa stage 4.

Start to practise vishuddhi shuddhi in order to develop sensitivity to the position of vishuddhi chakra and kshetram trigger points. Also you should continue the practice of chakra shuddhi for the other four chakras: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura and anahata.

We have not given any detailed descriptions of any new asanas apart from padadhirasana, because we want you to perfect and slowly increase the duration of sirshasana.

You should continue nadi shodhana pranayama with maha bandha¹.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	20
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	20
Ajapa Japa – Stage 4	20
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	4
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 4	10
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Vishuddhi Shuddhi	10
Ajapa Japa – Stage 4	10
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general benefits

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
	30

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4

Lesson 24

There is the Moon and the Sun
And between them is the Seed.

 This last is that being
Whose nature is Joy Supreme.

—*Hevajra Tantra*

Health

The most basic and important thing in life is good health. Without abundant health, it is impossible to aspire towards anything. Illness dulls the whole mind and body. Perceptions, enthusiasm, positivity and so forth are all diminished. It is only with loss of health that a person understands the incapacitating effect of bad health, and profoundly appreciates the meaning of good health. Health only becomes a problem when one does not have it. So if you are ill, then your first concern should be to attain perfect health. If you already have good health, then take care to maintain this exalted state of being, which all the wealth in the world cannot buy. To meet the challenges of your life good health is essential.

Health survey

In a very revealing article entitled: 'International Comparison of Medical Care' in the Scientific American Vol. 233, No. 2, dated August 1975, written by Professor Kerr L. White, there are details of a health survey carried out in the U.S.A., Canada, U.K., Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Finland, Poland and Argentina. Approximately 48,000 people were questioned, representing a cross-section of 15,000,000 people in specific areas of the named countries.

For the purposes of the survey, signs of bad health were as follows:

- Inability to fully carry out one's social duties.
- Detectable known illness.
- Physiological symptoms of illness such as phlegm, cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, stiffness, anxiety and swelling of joints.
- Dental morbidity.
- Perceptible visual morbidity.

A healthy person was defined as one who did not show any of these signs. A functionally healthy person was defined as a person who, though able to work and not confined to bed, reported some slight chronic but not disabling

ailment, and who manifested one or more of the above signs to a slight degree.

In the survey, people were questioned about their state of health. Those questioned did not include people in hospitals or any form of health institution.

A summary of some of the results is as follows:

- *Healthy* – 14.3% (average)
- *Functionally healthy* – 24.4% (average)
- *Unhealthy* – 61.3% (our figure)

It was also found that between 7.7% and 30.4% of people were chronically disabled (physically impaired, handicapped, or with long-standing bad health resulting in some disability).

We have summarized only a small part of the article. If you want to see more relevant statistics, then we suggest that you read the report for yourself.

This survey is very revealing. It shows that the standard of health of people in the countries involved is generally not very good. In the areas surveyed, a mere 14.3% are healthy, while 7.7 to 30.4% (an enormous figure!) are permanently disabled to a greater or lesser extent. Note these figures. Among those people regarded as disabled are those injured in the last war. This makes the figure rather high; but at the same time there are many people included in this figure (7.7–30.4%) who could attain better health if the correct steps were taken.

Similar figures would probably be obtained in surveys in other parts of the world. The health of the average person is not as it should be. We suggest that if you are one of the 85.7% who are unhealthy or functionally healthy, you should take immediate and sensible steps to become one of the 14.3% who boast of good health. Don't be satisfied until you feel energy and vitality pulsating throughout the entire body and mind. Use all means that are readily available and which are suitable for your specific ailment. The natural state of your body

and mind is vibrant good health; bad health is unnatural. You should use any healing system that will bring about positive results, namely good health.

Mental and physical diseases

It is often said that: 'all diseases are in the mind'. This is a very trite statement that too many people use without the slightest thought. If by mind one means cosmic mind, then indeed all diseases are in the mind, but very few people identify their mind with the cosmic mind. If by mind one means individualized mind, which is almost certainly the case, then all diseases are not necessarily in the mind. It is a matter of identity and definition.

Most of you will have heard of bilharzia. If you have not then we will explain it. It is a disease that plagues millions of people in the world, especially in places such as the Nile delta in Egypt. It occurs in places where people excrete and urinate in the same water that they drink. It is caused by a flat-worm parasite that invades the blood and bladder of the unfortunate victim. It debilitates the whole body so that there is no energy. This is why it is possible to see countless people in the affected areas walking around looking half-dead. There is nothing mental about this disease; it is entirely physical.

We could give many other examples of diseases that are physical in cause. These could include contagious diseases such as cholera, smallpox and any ailment that arises through insufficient food or food that is harmful. All these diseases require a direct approach through any healing system that is available and that brings results.

Many diseases, especially modern diseases, do have their main root in the mind. Besides all mental illnesses, these include such diseases as cancer, diabetes, indigestion and so forth. It is these types of diseases that are particularly amenable to cure through yoga practices. In these cases also, any healing system should be adopted that will bring results.

The mind and body are really part of one unit but for the sake of definition and explanation, we can say that certain diseases are mainly mental in cause while others are mainly physical. Mental diseases cause derangement in the body and physical diseases cause derangement or loss of efficiency of the mind.

They are directly related. The treatment of some diseases will need a more direct physical approach whether from medicine, yogasanas, pranayama or whatever is suitable. The healing system adopted should be one that brings mental relaxation, removal of phobias and any other mental imbalance. In this field, yoga is particularly powerful. It brings wonderful results.

The important thing to remember is that one should adopt a suitable healing system whether the disease is predominantly physical or mental.

Different healing systems

There is a vast spectrum of healing systems that can be adopted to bring about removal of an ailment. Some are well known and widely practised; others are almost unknown and rarely practised. The following is a list of healing systems that may be found useful in treating disease:

- yoga
- allopathic medicine
- homeopathic medicine
- ayurveda
- acupuncture
- herbal medicine (such as unani in India)
- naturopathy
- chromotherapy (use of colours)
- gem therapy
- massage
- chiropractic or osteopathy (manipulation of joints and bones)
- music or sound therapy (including use of mantras)
- perfume therapy
- zone therapy (foot zone massage)
- urine therapy

And so on. If you have a disease, then you should consider any of these systems as a possible means of treatment. Don't restrict yourself to one system, especially if it does not bring results. Be sure to use any one of these healing systems only under expert guidance.

Application of the right system

Each healing system has its place. For specific ailments some systems are better than others. It is important to choose the correct healing system for the treatment of a given disease. Some systems act more directly; others act

more subtly. Gem therapy, perfume therapy and colour therapy, for example, have a very subtle influence on the mind and body. They are not very useful in the treatment of diseases such as dysentery. Allopathic medicine, on the other hand, will act directly to help bring about a cure of dysentery.

It is important that the practitioner of any of these healing systems, whether doctor, masseur, chiropractor, naturopath or whatever, knows the limitations of the system that he follows. People who prescribe a method of treatment must know its limitations and its remedial powers. They must know the field in which that particular system is useful and stick to that field. Ailments that cannot be treated should be left to other healing systems that can provide a remedy. There is surely a system available to help treat every disease. Practitioners of every healing system make the mistake of overstepping themselves. They recommend their method for an ailment which it cannot cure. This causes unnecessary suffering to patients through adopting an inadequate or unsuitable healing system for that particular disease.

The same criticism can be applied to yoga enthusiasts. Too often one asana is recommended as the certain treatment for an ailment such as hernia. This misinformed approach is not only wasting the time of the patient, it is also 'cheating' him, as well as giving yoga a bad name. The patient will tend to criticize yoga as a healing system when he gets no relief. It is therefore important in all systems, including yoga, that the expert knows all the limitations.

All systems have their place and help in maintaining good health. All systems should be seen as being part of the spectrum of healing systems. The different systems should be unified so that barriers are broken down between them. In this way the best treatment for a given ailment is more likely to be prescribed. Let all systems be unified so that they can form one comprehensive system.

If you have an ailment you have to use some discretion in adopting a certain healing system. Don't become tied to one system or one person. The test is in the cure. Therefore, look carefully until you find a system that brings relief. Give the healing system that you adopt a chance to work. Many diseases take time to

treat, some healing methods act slowly. The important thing is the final result . . . abundant good health.

The place of yoga as a healing system

Yoga may not cure a broken leg, but can help to prevent hernia. Yoga alone may not cure bilharzia, but it can help to treat countless other ailments. It can treat all types of mental disorders, from which stem a large array of ailments. It can be used to treat cancer, polio, diabetes, constipation, asthma, high blood pressure, sexual malfunctions, anxiety, arthritis, backache, rheumatism, colds, coughs, epilepsy, varicose veins, piles, flatulence, migraine, pyorrhoea, sciatica, sinusitis, slipped disc, gastric ulcers, indigestion, insomnia, eczema and a multitude of other diseases. There are many authenticated cases of people who now have perfect health, having once suffered from some disease and removed it through regular yoga practices.

Yoga tackles diseases in the following manner:

- Massages and improves the efficiency of the internal organs through asanas.
- Tones up the nerve connections by asanas.
- Improves the blood circulation through asanas.
- Improves respiration and general vitality of the body through pranayama.
- Cleans the body of impurities through asanas, pranayama and the shatkarmas such as jala neti¹, shankhaprakshalana², kunjla kriya³ and so on.
- Relaxes the mind and body through scientific relaxation techniques such as shavasana⁴ and yoga nidra⁵.
- Removes mental suppressions, phobias, neuroses, and all other negative aspects of the mind. This brings about greater happiness in life and removes many diseases.

Yoga methods simultaneously influence both the body and the mind. It is for this reason that yoga methods are so effective in treating a wide range of diseases.

Yoga techniques are also a great help in maintaining the body in good physical shape. In other words, yoga is good preventative medicine.

It is your duty to gain first class health, not only for yourself, but so that you can participate positively in the world. If you are ill

then you will tend to be self-centred; this must be the case. It is difficult to practise bhakti yoga, karma yoga and so forth with enthusiasm and effort if you are stricken with some chronic ailment. It is also almost impossible to practise kriya yoga if you are ill. The first thing you need in life is health, so if you have a disease, any disease, take immediate steps to remove it. Adopt any means, any healing system that is suitable, available and which brings results, without causing other problems in its wake. Yoga is one of these systems.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁵ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5



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Ajna

Ajna Chakra

The ajna chakra is the sixth and last of the chakras that we will discuss. It represents the highest of the psychic centres in man. Above this level are bindu and sahasrara, which are not chakras or psychic centres – they really come into the realm of the ineffable¹.

In the human framework there are said to be ten doors of perception. The first nine are the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anus and sexual organ. These are the gateways through which a person communicates with the outside world. The tenth door is ajna chakra, which leads 'upwards'. It is the tenth sense that leads directly to sahasrara, the source of all things. The first nine doors lead out to the material realms of being; the tenth door, *ajna chakra*, leads into the more subtle realms. It is the gateway to the fountainhead of life.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *ajna* means 'command'. This chakra is so called because it represents the level of awareness and harmony where it is possible for direct mind to mind communication between two people. It is the stage of sensitivity where individual minds can meet. It is the centre through which the guru communicates with his disciples and gives them commands. It is the link or bridge between the guru and disciple; therefore, this chakra is often called the *guru chakra*. It is the gateway to the inner temple of subtle initiation.

Ajna chakra has many other names. It is called the *eye of intuition* where an awakened aspirant can perceive events in both the outer and psychic realms. The most common name is the *third eye* – the psychic eye that is located midway between the two physical eyes. This is the eye that looks inwards instead of outwards. It is an eye that everyone has, yet which few people know about and fewer actually open and use. In a sense most people are blind, since this third eye is never used to view the deeper

levels of being. It lies dormant. In Sikhism it is also called the *tisra til* (third eye).

In India, the ajna chakra is called the *divya chakshu* (divine eye); the *jnana chakshu* or *jnana netra* (eye of knowledge) for it is the channel through which the spiritual aspirant receives revelation and insight into the underlying nature of existence. It is also called the *eye of Shiva*. There are various reasons for this name; one is that the ajna chakra is the means through which consciousness (Shiva) filters down to individuality. Also Shiva is the epitome of meditation and this is directly associated with awakening of the ajna chakra.

Various poets of India, such as Kabir, allude to the ajna chakra. They call it such names as the *bankunal* (the curving, zigzagging path) indicating the precarious path to wisdom; and the *bhramariguha* (cave of bees) indicating that subtle sound (nada) is the home-line between the ajna chakra of individual being and the sahasrara.

The ajna chakra trigger point is located in the centre of the brain at the top of the spine. However, this is a difficult area to sense for the purpose of yogic practices. Therefore, an associated trigger point called the *bhrumadhya* is used to awaken ajna chakra.

Bhrumadhya

The Sanskrit word *bhru* means 'eyebrow' and *madhya* means 'centre'. Therefore, the meaning of *bhrumadhya* is 'eyebrow centre'. This exactly describes the location, of this point. It is also called *trikuti* – 'the dwelling place at the eyebrows'.

The ajna chakra and *bhrumadhya* are really part of the same centre. Ajna chakra at the top of the spine is connected directly to the *bhrumadhya* between the two eyebrows by a psychic passage called *maha nadi*. Therefore, stimulation of *bhrumadhya* will also stimulate ajna chakra. Since the *bhrumadhya* is much easier to locate, it is widely used in yogic

practices to awaken ajna chakra. These two centres are so closely interrelated they are often regarded as one psychic centre, and for practical purposes there is nothing wrong with this. Together, they can be regarded as the third eye.

Bhramadhya (and ajna) is the centre where ida and pingala end – where they merge with sushumna². These three nadis (psychic passages) merge together to become sushumna alone. For this reason, the bhrumadhya is also called *triveni* (the three strands), *mukta triveni* (the place of three strands from which one gains liberation) and the *trikuti* (the dwelling or meeting place of the three nadis). Bhrumadhya is also called *prayaga* after a town in India which lies at the junction of the rivers Ganges and Jamuna, and the mythical underground river Saraswati, which connects them. These three rivers represent ida, pingala and sushumna respectively.

Bhramadhya lies directly in front of ajna chakra. In many yogic practices, bhrumadhya is used to awaken ajna. In kriya yoga, however, one must try to locate ajna directly. We will shortly describe techniques to develop sensitivity.

All the other chakras that we have described, except mooladhara, were associated with a corresponding chakra kshetram on the front of the body. In a sense, bhrumadhya can be regarded as the kshetram of ajna chakra, although actually the relationship is much more direct.

Ajna chakra in different traditions

The awakening of ajna chakra is the heart of all mind expanding, religious and mystical traditions. Sometimes it is widely described and symbolized, as in India; often it is hardly mentioned at all. But always, in mystical circles, its existence and significance has been known; without awakening ajna it is impossible to gain wisdom and open up the deeper layers of one's being.

Because of its importance, ajna chakra is widely mentioned in texts and teachings throughout the world. The following are a few obvious examples.

Many people, such as the ancient Egyptians and the American Indians, wore special head raiments that symbolized the third eye at the eyebrow centre. Often a snake is shown

emerging from the forehead, indicating that the kundalini rises through ajna via sushumna.

Ajna chakra is clearly mentioned in the *Bible*: "The light of the body is the eye (ajna); therefore, if thine eye be single, the whole body shall be full of light." (Matthew 6:22) There is a lot of information within this short verse. First of all it explains that ajna chakra is the psychic centre which connects man to the source, sahasrara. If one's mind is concentrated (thine eye be single) then one can perceive the more subtle aspects of being through ajna chakra. The result will be illumination and wisdom.

The medieval mystic Eckhart similarly stated: "The eye with which I see the supreme is the same as that with which it sees me." This statement also has many implications. Ajna chakra is the bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm, between the finite and the infinite, and between man and pure consciousness. Like a bridge over a river, it can be traversed from either side. Thus ajna chakra is the means by which consciousness manifests into individual man and activates man's actions and thoughts (pravritti path). Conversely, ajna is man's means of making the return journey (nivritti path) and communing with the source. Ajna is the door of subtle perception, and is what William Blake referred to when he said: "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to man as it is . . . infinite." This verse implies that when the mind becomes harmonized, one-pointed and a perfect instrument, then one can gaze through the window of ajna into the infinite.

The mystics of ancient Greece knew of the ajna chakra. Plato wrote: "In all men there is the eye of the soul, which can be re-awakened by the correct means. It is far more precious than ten thousand physical eyes." There are many methods of helping to open up the ajna. Plato was initiated by a mystical sect and was the disciple of Socrates; he therefore used the appropriate methods that he was taught.

Many sects and traditions symbolize the ajna chakra by an open eye, whether alone or shown on the forehead of a deity, yogi and so forth. Bear this in mind when you study old texts, fables and when you see pictures of one-eyed people. It is the ajna that is being indicated. Incidentally, in the Kabbala, the Ain Soph (sahasrara) is often symbolized by a closed

eye. This means that one will tune in with the sahasrara when one's perception is directed along the sushumna through ajna chakra. Illumination will arise when the eye of subtle perception, the ajna chakra, is directed away from both external and psychic phenomenon, hence the closed eye.

Many statues of Buddha indicate the ajna chakra by a jewel placed at the eyebrow centre. This is the divine eye of perception that Buddha awakened when he sat under the bodhi tree and was enlightened. This leads to the sahasrara, indicated by a large number of petals around the head.

The ajna chakra is widely symbolized in Hinduism and Tantra. Many of the deities, such as Shiva and Dakshina Kali, often have a clear marking on the forehead. Also, one of the most widespread rituals of India involves placing a *tilaka* (spot of coloured powder) on the forehead of all people during a religious or festive occasion. Furthermore, all married Hindu women wear a tilaka on their forehead at all times. This tilaka symbolizes the bhrum-adhya and ajna chakra.

There are many mystical stories that describe the awakening of the ajna chakra. For example, a well known one concerns Shiva. The devas (celestial and divine beings) were being molested by asuras (demons). The devas represent the positive, harmonious aspects of the mind; the asuras represent the negative forces. The devas help one along the path to wisdom, whereas the asuras retard one's progress. Therefore, the confrontation between the devas and the asuras means a person's spiritual progress is being hampered. When the asuras gain the upper hand then there is a retardation. When the devas become dominant, then one makes spiritual progress.

Let us return to the story. The devas discovered that the asuras could only be destroyed by a child born of Shiva, but Shiva lived in the Himalayas and sat continuously in meditation. How could he possibly produce a child? A plot was hatched. The devas sent Kama Deva, or Kandarpa (the equivalent of Cupid in European mythology) to disturb Shiva's meditative bliss and incite passion so that Shiva would produce a child with his wife Parvati. Kama Deva shot his arrow of passion at Shiva, but Shiva was unmoved. He merely sat on his tiger skin with his eyes firmly closed.

However, he opened his third eye, keeping his fleshy eyes closed. He saw Kama Deva and perceived his motives. He immediately emitted a thunderbolt of psychic power which instantly killed Kama Deva. The story continues and involves various other plots and ploys. Eventually, Shiva is persuaded to mate with Parvati and their son Subramaniyan was born. He is known as the lord of the celestial realms and he destroys the demons.

This story can be interpreted in many different ways. For example, the ajna chakra destroys attachment to passion and other worldly interests (indicated by Kama Deva). One can still act in the world, passionately or otherwise (as in the case of Shiva), but there will be an attitude of inner detachment. However, we have narrated this story more because it makes interesting reading, rather than for any other reason. We leave the reader to interpret the meaning of the story for himself.

The ajna chakra has been symbolized in a large number of traditions and will continue to be so in future. In fact the Bihar School of Yoga will continue this tradition, since we have adopted the symbol of ajna chakra for our emblem.

Ajna chakra and the pineal gland

Ajna chakra is often directly related to the physical pineal gland, the pea-sized endocrinal gland located in the centre of the head. In fact, they are often regarded as one and the same thing. This is rather an over-simplification. The difference should be clearly understood. The pineal gland refers to the physical body; the ajna chakra spans the chasm between the physical and the most subtle psychic realms. In fact, ajna chakra leads beyond the psychic realms via sushumna. It seems likely that the pineal gland is part of ajna chakra; it is that part of ajna chakra that acts in the physical body. But ajna chakra as a whole goes much deeper. Ajna can be compared to a mountain in the sea; the peak, the island that can be seen above the surface of the sea, is the pineal gland. The rest of ajna chakra, the base of the mountain, goes much, much deeper than can be seen with normal perception.

The physiological functions of the pineal gland have baffled medical scientists for

centuries. Even today it is not very well understood, though gradually it is divulging its secrets. It seems that the pineal gland acts as a biological clock which regulates man's activities according to outside circumstances. It has been found that the eyes and the pineal gland are connected via the sympathetic nervous system; and that light entering the eyes directly influences some of the functions of the pineal. The pineal gland in turn regulates the whole sympathetic nervous system which greatly controls human behaviour. Thus cosmic rhythms, such as night and day, the moon and sun cycle and so forth, influence man's behaviour via the pineal gland. Melatonin and other hormones are produced in response to outside stimuli; these in turn produce changes in sexual behaviour, menstrual cycles, nervous energy and other biological rhythms of man. Thus it seems that the pineal gland acts like a radio antenna, which picks up outside signals and regulates man's behaviour accordingly.

It is interesting to note that the pineal gland is not directly connected to the brain, at least as far as we can tell by current scientific research. It therefore seems that man's behaviour is influenced by two systems – the pineal gland and the mind acting through the brain.

Besides being a link between the outer material environment and man, it seems that the pineal gland also acts as a gateway to the more subtle realms of the psyche. The pineal gland is a physical transducer between the physical and psychic planes. Thus psychic changes can induce corresponding physical changes via the pineal gland. Conversely, physical, chemical or any other stimulation of the pineal gland can bring about repercussions in the psyche. This is indicated by practices of *trataka* (blinkless gazing) where the ajna chakra can be awakened via the eyes and pineal gland; the practice of *sirshasana* can also induce psychic changes, though to a lesser degree, by increasing the blood supply to the pineal gland. Various drugs also bring about psychic changes; it is possible that they directly influence the chemistry of the pineal gland. Thus it appears that the pineal gland is a switch or a sluice gate which restricts or opens up psychic awareness. Direct stimulation of the pineal gland by various yogic practices can help to awaken the ajna chakra.

To summarize: the pineal gland is a material body that seems to be a physical manifestation of the ajna chakra. They are not the same, for the ajna chakra, while including the pineal gland, dives much deeper into the more subtle levels of being. The ajna is the link between the physical level of being and the sahasrara.

Attributes of the ajna chakra

The ajna is the seat of the mind, the purified *buddhi* (subtle intelligence). When this chakra is awakened, fickleness of the individual mind is dispersed. Attachment, the cause of lack of discrimination and ignorance, fades away. The mind becomes a perfect instrument.

Ajna chakra is the centre of wisdom. It represents the level of awareness where one begins to see and realize the hidden essence behind all visible things. It is the centre of intuition where one tunes in with the underlying essence, rather than manifested forms. When ajna is awakened, the meaning and significance of symbols flashes into one's conscious perception. Ajna chakra represents the level of revelatory knowledge.

Ajna is the centre of extrasensory perception. *Siddhis* (psychic powers) arise according to one's *samskaras* (mental tendencies). One can experience clairvoyance – vision of far away events. One can detect the real meaning and ideas of a person who is speaking, independent of what is being spoken. Ajna chakra is the centre whereby one can communicate without speaking; it is the centre of direct mind to mind thought transference. Various siddhis can arise according to the propensities of the individual, but one should not become attached to these siddhis, one should treat them as one would treat a plague – very warily. Attachment to siddhis is a great obstacle on the path to wisdom; this block is called *rudra granthi* (knot of Shiva) and applies especially at the level of ajna chakra. This hurdle of attachment must be transcended; one must pierce this psychic block with the axe of inner detachment.

When ajna chakra is awakened, *sankalpa shakti* (willpower) becomes very strong. Mental resolves are almost automatically translated into fruition, providing they are in accordance with individual dharma. This chakra is also the centre where one begins to gain more control of prana. In fact, this chakra is important in the yoga technique of *prana vidya* (psychic

control and healing). Ajna is the distributive centre where one transmits prana to specific areas of the body.

Ajna chakra is the centre where ida and pingala meet and merge together to become one. That is, the outside and the inside environments become one reality. Opposites are harmonized into a unified whole. One functions in the sushumna tube.

Ajna is the witnessing centre. One becomes the unmoving witness of all events, including those of one's own mind and body. Though involved, passively or intensely, in the play of life (lila), one merely observes. One functions at the balance point, where there is both inner communion with the depths of one's being, and interaction with the outer world. When ajna awakens one begins to perform real karma yoga, without expectation, selflessly and with perfection. Intuition begins to predominate in one's actions. Actions of the mind and body become perfect responses to given situations. The ups and downs of the mind-body will less and less affect one's being. They will gradually be seen as something external to the inner core of one's nature. Life will carry on as usual, but more harmoniously and with greater wisdom. The body and mind will be seen to follow its own inclinations in the way that they were designed.

Ajna chakra represents an elevated level of awareness. In Sanskrit it is called *tapah loka*, the level where the vestiges of one's imperfections are burned away.

Symbology

In the front of the topic you will find a symbolic representation of ajna chakra. In the centre is the symbol of AUM, the *bija* (seed) mantra of this chakra.

In the centre of the diagram there is the black itara lingam. The Sanskrit word *itara* means 'another', or 'the other, different from'. And this is a perfect description, for it indicates that this lingam is the entrance to the *para* lingam of the sahasrara. The itara lingam of the ajna chakra is different from but leads directly to the ultimate lingam.

The ajna has two lotus petals, one inscribed with the sun and the other with the moon. These two petals and the sun and moon represent the pingala and ida nadis respectively. Two mantras are also inscribed on each

petal: हं (ham) and क्षं (ksham). These are the two mantras for Shiva and Shakti, which merge at the ajna.

Ajna has the same implications as the cross: effacement of ego and union of opposites. It was at the centre of the cross that Christ was crucified, transcending his ego and the level of ajna chakra.

Ajna is widely associated with the planet Jupiter, for this planet represents the guru. In the Vedas, ajna is symbolized by Brihaspati, the guru of the devas. It is also interesting that in alchemy the metal tin represents Jupiter, the guru and wisdom. The metal copper symbolizes the planet Venus and devotion; this devotion is that of the disciple. The combination of these two metals, tin (guru and wisdom) plus copper (the disciple's devotion), produces the well known alloy bronze. This bronze is the metal of initiation and the link between the guru and disciple. This link arises most directly at ajna chakra.

Location

The trigger point of ajna chakra is located at the top of the spine in the centre of the head. It lies in the region of the medulla oblongata and the pineal gland. If you look in a physiology textbook you will get a clear idea of the physical location.

The *bhrumadhya*, the direct trigger or switch of ajna, lies in the centre of the two eyebrows on the forehead. Ajna lies directly and horizontally behind the *bhrumadhya*. A drop of tiger balm, camphor, etc. can be placed at the eyebrow centre to intensify perception of the exact location of the *bhrumadhya*.

PRACTICES

Almost all yogic practices are concerned with awakening ajna chakra, whether directly or indirectly. The following are a few which simultaneously develop sensitivity to the location of ajna and the *bhrumadhya* in preparation for kriya yoga. We don't expect you to do all of them – choose one or two and practise them regularly.

Trataka

This is a very powerful technique³. With regard to developing sensitivity to the location of ajna chakra and *bhrumadhya*, a candle is

certainly the best object. Feel as though you are gazing at the candle, or whatever object you choose, with your eyebrow centre instead of the two eyes.

A particularly powerful method for developing simultaneously sensitivity to both ajna and bhrumadhya involves the integration of *trataka* with the flow of breath as described in stage 3. You should try to feel that the breath is piercing both ajna and bhrumadhya while it flows to and fro along the *maha nadi*. That is, as you breathe in feel that the breath is being drawn in through the eyebrow centre to eventually pierce ajna; as you breathe out feel that the breath is being pushed forwards from ajna to eventually pierce the eyebrow centre. Continue in this manner while maintaining a concentrated gaze on the candle flame.

Trikuti Sandhanam

The word *sandhanam* means 'search'. Therefore, this practice can be called 'the search of the location of the bhrumadhya'. The practice is as follows:

Sit in a comfortable *asana* (you can also practise while lying flat on the floor, but be careful not to sleep). Try to feel the location of the eyebrow centre. Feel the rhythmic blood pulse at that point; at first the pulsation may be indistinct, but with time and practice you will clearly discern it.

For at least 5 minutes fix your attention on the pulse.

Then mentally integrate the sound of Aum with each pulsation at the eyebrow centre . . .
Aum Aum Aum Aum Aum . . .

Be totally aware of this continuous vibration of Aum . Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

Note: this practice can be done at any time during the day, whether working or resting, eating or walking. Using this technique one will become very sensitive to the bhrumadhya.

Shambhavi Mudra

Shambhavi mudra is also called bhrumadhya drishti (eyebrow gazing) and is an excellent method of developing sensitivity to the bhrumadhya and should be mastered in this *sadhana* course⁴. It is an integral part of *kriya yoga*.

Kriya yoga – ajna location

Kriya yoga is one of the most powerful methods of awakening ajna chakra if it is practised sincerely and regularly. In various specific techniques attention is directed to ajna chakra in the centre of the head. Location is not easy at first, though it becomes easier with practice and time. As preparation for *kriya yoga*, we suggest that you spend a few minutes every day trying to locate ajna chakra. Sit quietly and focus your attention at the centre of the head. Eventually you will become sensitive to the exact location. The best time to practise is immediately after *trataka*, *trikuti sandhanam*, *shambhavi mudra* or, in fact, any other meditative technique. This will prepare you for the forthcoming *kriya yoga* techniques.

Notes

¹ Bindu – Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5; Sahasrara – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

² For details refer to the following references:
Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2; Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 2; Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

³ *Trataka*: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6; Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6; Stage 3 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

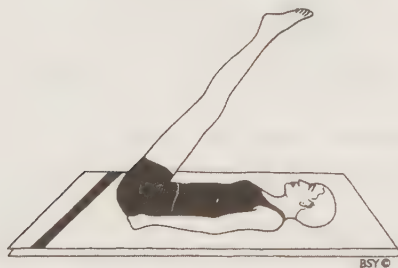
⁴ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

Asanas: Practice

Halasana is both a forward bending and a semi-inverted pose. It gives many benefits, especially when combined with *sarvangasana*¹. The main reason for introducing it at this time is that it is an excellent preparation for the first kriya yoga technique, *vipareeta karani mudra*². Perfection of *halasana* will make *vipareeta karani mudra* easy to perform. We therefore suggest that you practise *halasana* and *sarvangasana* as a preparation for the more advanced practices.

HALASANA (PLOUGH POSE)

The Sanskrit word *hala* means 'plough'. *Halasana* is so called because in its final pose it resembles a plough; not the modern mechanized plough but the wooden plough pulled by oxen or bulls that has been used in India since time immemorial and still is. The resemblance is very close. The English name for this asana is, not surprisingly, 'the plough pose'.



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Technique – basic form

The traditional method of doing *halasana* is as follows:

Lie flat on the floor, facing upward. The legs should be straight and together and should remain so throughout the practice. The palms can face upward or downward; beginners may place their fists under the buttocks with the knuckles facing upwards. Relax the whole body and prepare for the practice. Breathe in deeply.

Then slowly raise the two legs to the vertical position; use the abdominal muscles as much as possible and the arms as little as possible.

The aim, eventually, is to use only the abdominal muscles to raise the legs without the slightest help of the arms; this may require a little time and practice.

Then fold the legs over the top of the head, keeping them straight as illustrated.

As the legs are raised over the head, the buttocks and hips should also be simultaneously raised.

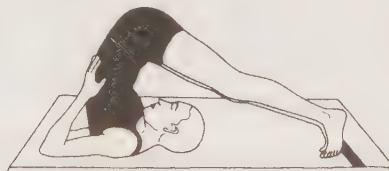
Gently lower the feet toward the ground behind the head, but without the slightest strain.

If possible touch the toes to the ground behind the head; those who are unable to do this should allow their feet to suspend above the floor.

This is the final pose.

The hands and arms can be positioned as follows:

1. Keep in the same position with arms flat on the floor behind and to the side of the back.
2. The arms folded behind the back of the head with the hands clasped together.
3. The hands placed behind the hips as shown in the following picture.



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You can choose any one of these three alternatives.

In the final pose relax the whole body as much as possible, keeping the legs straight.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Maintain awareness of the breathing process. Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then either perform some or all of the variations (see later text) or return immediately to the starting position.

Before returning to the starting position, the arms should be placed behind and to the side of the back, flat on the ground.

The sequence of return is the reverse of that already described to take the final pose.

The movement should be slow and controlled, using the abdominal muscles as much as possible.

The legs should be lowered gently to the ground without any thud as they reach the floor; the back of the head should remain in contact with the floor throughout.

Breathing

Inner retention while raising the body from the ground to the final pose. Slow, deep and rhythmical in the final pose. Inner retention while returning to the starting position.

Advice to beginners

Beginners will probably have difficulty touching the toe's to the floor behind the head in the final pose. Under no circumstances should one use force or sudden jerks in order to touch the floor, for this is the quickest way to strain the spine and be out of action for a week or so.

Let the feet suspend above the floor, keeping the legs straight. Regular practice over a period of weeks will make the back more supple, and the toes will gradually move nearer to the ground. The aim is to stretch the muscles progressively, not permanently by force. Regular practice of other forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana³, yoga mudra⁴, janu sirshasana⁵, shashankasana⁶ and so forth will also help to loosen up the spine and lead to perfection of halasana.

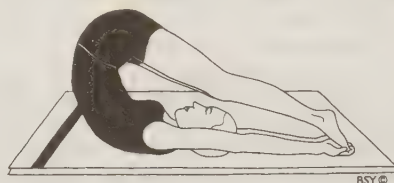
Alternative starting position

The final pose of sarvangasana can also be used as the starting position for halasana. In this case, the legs are slowly lowered over the head from the vertical position in the manner already described.

Variations

There are many variations of halasana, all of which have distinctive benefits. We will shortly

describe six. They are all performed from the final pose of basic halasana. They should not be attempted until one can easily do this basic form. These variations can be practised individually or one after the other as follows:



Variation 1: lower back stretch

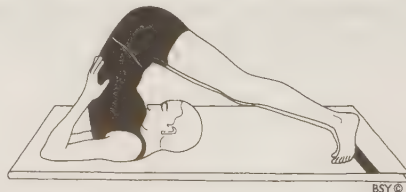
From the final pose of halasana, the toes should be gradually moved nearer towards the back of the head.

The legs should be kept straight and together. Grasp the toes with the hands to accentuate the process.

The final pose is as shown in variation 1. Relax the body as much as possible, especially the spine.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

This variation notably stretches the lower back (lumbo-sacral) and makes it more supple.



Variation 2: upper back stretch

From the basic pose of halasana, gradually push the toes away from the back of the head. The hands can be placed behind the hips.

The legs should remain straight and together. In the final pose there will be a tight chin lock as shown.

The toes should be as far away from the head as is comfortably possible.

Breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose.

This variation produces an accentuated stretch of the back and neck.

Variation 3: anchored back stretch

Take the final pose of the basic halasana.

Place the arms on the floor behind the head.

Grasp the big toes with the fingers.

Then variation 2 should be repeated; the toes should be gradually pushed away from the back of the head.

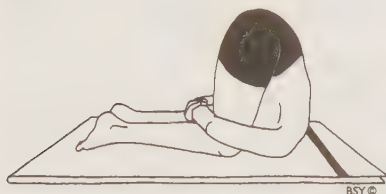
The toes, however, are anchored by the arms; this limits the movement of the toes away from the head and induces an accentuated muscular tension in the back muscles.

Hold the final pose, breathing deeply and slowly.

Then release the tension and relax.

This variation tenses all the back muscles and tones the associated nerves.

It also massages the kidneys and adrenal glands.



Variation 4: the neck stretch

This variation is widely known as *pashinee mudra* (the folded mudra).

Take the final pose of the basic form of halasana. Separate the legs by about half a metre.

Bend the legs and bring the knees – as close as possible towards the shoulders and ears; if possible, place the knees on the ground.

The thighs should be folded closely against the chest or as close as you are able.

The top of the feet should lie flat on the ground. Wrap the arms around the back of the knees and the head.

This is the final pose.

Try to relax the body as much as possible.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Many people will find this variation more difficult, though with practice it can be mastered.

The neck muscles are given a powerful stretch, the cervical (neck) vertebrae loosened and the associated nerves toned.

This variation also squeezes and massages the thyroid and parathyroid glands in the throat¹.

Variation 5: neck tensing pose

Take the final pose of the basic form of halasana.

Place the arms behind the back on the floor.

Interlock the fingers.

Push the feet away from the back of the head as far as is comfortable.

Then press the arms and hands against the floor so that the neck vertebrae are slightly raised off the ground.

In the final position, the weight of the body is supported on the back of the head, the shoulders, the hands and the arms.

Breathe slowly and deeply while maintaining the final pose.

Then release the muscular tension and relax the whole body.

This variation stimulates the large number of nerves passing through the neck. It improves their efficiency and in turn improves the health of the whole body.

Variation 6: pelvic stretch

Resume basic halasana.

Hold the big toes with the fingers of each hand.

Keeping the legs straight, slowly spread the legs on either side of the head; the toes should remain in contact with the ground.

Separate the legs as much as possible without straining.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

This pose stretches and tones pelvic muscles, nerves and organs.

Duration

The basic form can be practised for up to five minutes. Beginners should start with about thirty seconds in the final pose and increase by a few seconds every day.

Any of the variations can be practised for similar durations for specific purposes. If all the variations are performed one after the other, then we suggest ten deep and slow breaths in each pose.

Sequence

We suggest the following sequence:

1. Sarvangasana
2. Lower the feet into halasana
3. Some or all of the variations
4. Return to lying position on the floor
5. Counterpose

Counterpose

Any backward bending asanas can be used as a counterpose. The best ones are matsyasana⁷,

ushtrasana⁶, supta vajrasana⁷ and chakrasana⁹, because these release the compression of the throat by stretching the neck in the opposite direction.

Time of practice

The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast and late in the afternoon before the evening meal. Halasana should not be practised after meals or after vigorous exercises.

Limitations

People who suffer from hernia, slipped disc, sciatica, high blood pressure or any serious back ailments should not do halasana. If you are not sure then seek expert guidance.

Benefits

Halasana gives many of the same benefits as sarvangasana. However, the direct influence on the brain is much less, with more emphasis on the back, abdomen and pelvis. It combines the benefits of inverted asanas with forward bending asanas. Halasana is almost an upside down form of paschimottanasana, though there is a distinctive difference between the benefits that they give. Paschimottanasana acts mainly on the lower back and stretches the back; halasana, on the other hand, acts mainly on the upper back and neck region. These two asanas supplement each other.

Halasana makes the entire spine supple, stretches the muscles, loosens the vertebrae and tones the nerves both inside and outside the spinal column. This leads to better efficiency of all the organs in the body.

The thyroid and parathyroid glands are rendered more efficient. The abdominal muscles are strengthened. The abdominal organs are massaged. This helps to alleviate constipation, dyspepsia, diabetes and various other abdominal ailments. It generally decongests and revitalizes the liver, spleen, kidneys, pancreas, adrenal glands and so on. It helps to remove backache, neck ache and headache.

Besides these physical benefits, halasana done with attention can induce states of pratyahara (sense withdrawal) as a preparation for meditation techniques.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

³ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 2

⁵ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

⁶ Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 2

⁷ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

⁸ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3

⁹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

Pranayama: Practice

If pranayama is practised regularly and for a reasonable duration everyday, then it can awaken the kundalini power. This is clearly indicated in the traditional hatha yoga texts: “Those who have mastery over their breathing process, awaken the fire of the kundalini so that it enters the sushumna without hindrance.” (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:19)

As one advances in the practice of pranayama, precautions have to be taken. One must ensure that the body is purified. Pranayama itself will do this, but the shatkarmas, such as shankhaprakshalana, neti, etc. are perfectly suited for removing gross impurities. The importance of physical purity is indicated in the scriptures: “When the entire nervous system is purified of all impurities, then the yogi is able to hold his breath for long periods of time.” (*Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* v. 94) One should also make the body strong by regular practice of asanas.

Another important point, essential in fact, is that one must eat pure and vegetarian food. Failure to do this could easily lead to harm and disease. So if you are practising a lot of pranayama, then it is vital that you adopt a simple, balanced and pure diet.

Another point to remember is that serious pranayama should not be practised when you are ill. By serious we mean for durations of longer than twenty minutes and with extended breath retentions of more than thirty seconds. Therefore, take steps to find good health before undertaking serious pranayama sadhana.

We suggest that all those who are practising a lot of pranayama should do so under the guidance of a competent teacher. Pranayama is a very powerful technique if it is done correctly; if done incorrectly, then it will cause you harm. If you master pranayama then you will become master of your mind. “Mind is the master of the senses and the breath is the master of the mind”. (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:29) Pranayama

itself can lead you to awareness of the depths of the mind and beyond, but please don't overdo the practice. You must practise for a few years in order to slowly accustom the physical and pranic body to new functional conditions. This point should be clearly understood and remembered.

NADI SHODHANA – STAGE 4 WITH MAHA BANDHA

Since Lesson 22 we have suggested that you combine nadi shodhana pranayama with maha bandha¹. This is an advanced technique, therefore you should continue to practise it, steadily increasing the duration of breath retention, but don't strain.

Those people who have not practised pranayama before should proceed through the practices that we have described since Lesson 3, taking as much time as they wish to do for each stage². Those who have already reached an intermediate stage should also proceed at their own pace.

Nadi shodhana pranayama combined with maha bandha is as far as we intend to go in this sadhana course. In Book III we will introduce other types of pranayama.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4

Meditation: Ajapa Japa (Stage 5)

In this lesson we will teach the fifth stage of ajapa. With regard to preparation for kriya yoga, this stage can be regarded as the last stage. There are further stages, but these are really an integral part of kriya yoga and will be discussed in Book III.

Spinal psychic passage

Between the trigger points of the ajna and mooladhara chakras lies the spinal psychic passage. It is called sushumna. It connects all the chakras together and is located within the centre of the spine. In stage 5 of ajapa you must feel the breath moving up and down within this psychic passage, piercing all the chakras in turn. You will have to use a little imagination. At first you may find this difficult, but with regular practice you will find it becomes natural. You will feel the breath moving within the spinal passage without the slightest effort.

AJAPA JAPA – STAGE 5

This fifth stage of ajapa brings in all the chakras that we have so far introduced. It is different to the previous stages in that one must now imagine the breath ascending and descending through the spine; in the previous four stages the breath was imagined to move in the frontal passage between the navel (manipura kshetram) and the front of the throat (vishuddhi kshetram)¹.

Technique

Take a comfortable sitting position.
Close the eyes and relax your whole body.
Spend a few minutes preparing your body and mind for the practice in the ways described for the previous stages (that is, Aum chanting, kaya sthairyam, etc.)¹.
Become aware of the breathing process.
Make it slower and deeper.
Fold your tongue into khechari mudra².

Slightly contract your throat and do ujjayi pranayama².

For a few minutes only be aware of the breath. When your breathing has become long and rhythmical, try to imagine that it is ascending with inhalation . . .

And descending with exhalation.

Try to feel the breath passing through each chakra in turn.

As you inhale, feel the breath moving from mooladhara to swadhisthana, then manipura, to anahata, vishuddhi and finally ajna.

Repeat the same process as you breathe out and descend from ajna to mooladhara.

After a few minutes synchronize the mantra *Soham* with the breath – *So* with inhalation upwards and *Ham* with exhalation downwards. Feel the mantra vibrating throughout your spine.

Feel it piercing each of the chakras in turn.

There must be total attentiveness.

Continue in this manner for 5 minutes or more.

Then watch the blank space in front of your closed eyes.

Be a witness to any psychic occurrences that arise.

If any visions arise, let them; don't interfere.

This is a method of cleaning out the mind.

After a few minutes return to ajapa, the awareness of the mantra and breath in the spinal passage.

Do this with total attentiveness for at least 5 minutes.

Then repeat the awareness of the chidakasha – the space in front of the closed eyes.

After some time return to ajapa.

Continue in this manner for as long as you can.

Duration of practice

You should aim to practise this technique for at least half an hour every day without fail, until you can practise it easily without effort.

Awareness

Mindfulness during ajapa is essential. You must be mindful of every activity, whether breathing, mantra or thoughts. Without this mindfulness you will slip into the state of drowsiness. This is called *tandra* or *laya* in Sanskrit. It is a great obstacle that has to be overcome. It is the stumbling block, the greatest impediment, the greatest hazard that faces every person who tries to practise meditation techniques. How many times have you practised a meditative technique and found that your mind has been brooding over some problem for many minutes without your awareness? During this period you were completely lost in your thoughts. It is only after the period of brooding that you realize you were brooding. This is in total opposition to the path of meditation.

You must be aware of what you are doing. You must be awake. If you feel sleepy, go and take a cold bath or wash your face. Or practise a few rounds of surya namaskara. Without developing mindfulness you will never be successful in meditative practices.

The mind can wander from the practice in hand . . . there is nothing wrong with this. In fact, initially this is positive, for it helps to release pent-up mental problems. But you must be aware of the thoughts as they arise. You must know that you are thinking about a certain subject. The mind will always wander here and there; it is its very nature. Let it but maintain mindfulness.

In ajapa you must be alert to all things that occur in the mind and the processes which are part of the practice. Don't suppress thoughts; this is not the way to harmonize the mind. Let them arise, but while simultaneously being attentive to the breath and mantra movement of ajapa.

General note

We have described the five stages of ajapa in order to prepare you for kriya yoga¹.

Ajapa is a powerful technique, especially if it is done continuously throughout the day and night. Many great yogis have attained highest stages of consciousness through this method alone. We realize that continuous practice is difficult for most people, especially those who have many responsibilities and this is nearly all of us. But at least try to do ajapa

as much as possible, whenever you find the time. Instead of brooding over past regrets and future problems, do ajapa. You can practise at any time . . . before sleep, before lunch, while on the bus or train to work or wherever. This will help to harmonize the mind and allow the deeper mental impressions (samskaras) to arise to conscious perception. This is the way to equanimity in life.

Notes

¹ Ajapa Japa: Stage 1 – Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5; Stage 2 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 5; Stage 3 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 5; Stage 4 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have fully described the implications of the ajna chakra, together with relevant techniques. Ajna is the most difficult of the chakras to locate; we therefore suggest that you practise trataka and trikuti sandhanam as a preparation. Also try to spend a few minutes every day directing your attention to the centre of the head; this will help to develop further sensitivity to the position of ajna. You should continue to practise chakra shuddhi in order

to develop more sensitivity to the other chakras and kshetrams. This will prepare you for kriya yoga techniques.

Continue to practise nadi shodhana combined with maha bandha¹. Don't strain.

Halasana should be integrated into your asana program. If you have time try to do some or all of the variations.

If you have mastered ajapa stage 4, then proceed to stage 5.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	20
Trataka	15
Trikuti Sandhanam	5
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	20
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	7
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Trataka	11
Trikuti Sandhanam	5
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	10
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Trikuti Sandhanam	8
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	14
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Halasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana	10
	30

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4

Book III

Kriya Yoga

Lesson 25

It was late at night in the monsoon season. The sky was dark and cloudy. There was an atmosphere of gloom. A lone sannyasin was slowly walking along the road looking for a quiet place to sleep. Though his possessions consisted only of a small bag, a blanket and a lantern, he was blissful and carefree.

Suddenly he heard a motor cycle behind him. The cyclist was travelling very fast along the dark road, but he had no light. The sannyasin knew that he would have an accident, so he immediately decided to give his lantern to the motor cyclist. He rotated the lantern in a circle to signal the cyclist to stop. However, the motor cyclist did not stop . . . he went straight past and nearly killed the sannyasin. The sannyasin called out: "Stop! I want to give you this lantern, otherwise you will injure yourself." The driver shouted back: "What's the point, I haven't got any brakes either!"

This story is an analogy of the life of modern man. The dark road is the path of life, generally lived without joy and wisdom. The motor cycle represents the human body-mind. Most people live a life that is like the reckless and thoughtless motor cyclist driving along the road; all aspiration and effort is directed towards attaining fame, wealth, luxury and other things that satisfy the ego, with little thought of the consequences and harmful

effects. People tread the path of life without knowing where they are going.

The light of the lantern represents wisdom; the brake represents self-discipline. The motor cyclist had neither a brake (self-discipline) nor light (wisdom). He was certain to meet with a serious accident. It is the same with any person who walks the path of life without wisdom and self-discipline – he will pay the penalty in the form of frustration, illness and despair.

The sannyasin on the road tried to give a light to the motor cyclist, but it was not accepted because the cyclist was unable to apply his brakes. It is the dharma (duty) of a sannyasin to guide other people along the path of life, so that they avoid accidents in the form of disease, fulfil themselves and gradually tread the correct path to self-knowledge. If you can apply a brake in your life, then you will be ready to accept a guiding light.

The light that a sannyasin can give to others is yoga. There are many different types of light, just as there are many different paths of yoga. One of the brightest lights is the ancient and powerful system of kriya yoga. In this book we are making an offering – a light to those people who are now living in darkness, but who are willing to accept a lantern and willing to apply the brake of self-discipline. We offer you the lantern of kriya yoga.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Outline of Book III

Over the following twelve lessons of Book III we will progressively introduce the kriyas of kriya yoga. In each lesson we will describe one or two kriyas which you, the reader, should begin to practise. This means that, in this lesson you will practise the first two kriyas every day; in Lesson 26 we will introduce another kriya, so that you will begin to practise three kriyas every day. Gradually you will increase the duration of your kriya practice program as you learn more of the practices, always maintaining the correct sequence.

During the beginning stages of kriya yoga you can continue to practise other yogic techniques apart from kriya yoga, since the first few kriyas take only a short period of time to complete. Gradually you should discard the other yoga techniques and integrate kriyas into your practice timetable as we introduce them. We will continue to give a list of suggested practice programs to help you choose a suitable mode of practice.

The third book will be divided into two parts to allow the student to gain not only knowledge of the kriyas, but also many other yogic techniques that have not been described so far:

1. Kriya yoga section that deals with only details of kriyas and directly related topics.
2. General section where we will discuss other yogic techniques and topics.

In accordance with our fundamental policy, we will be concerned only with practical methods of heightening the quality of your life, health and awareness. We are not so interested in philosophical speculations, for these do little to change and improve your life. In fact, they tend to complicate the mind and hinder any progress in yogic sadhana. We are concerned only with practical methods of unfolding and awakening the potential already existent in every person's being and transforming life into an expression of joy. We are not interested in talking about changes; we are

interested in bringing about changes. This falls directly in line with the nature of kriya yoga itself, which is one hundred percent practice orientated. You, the practitioner, must play your part. We cannot bring about changes in your life without your cooperation. You must practise and have aspiration. We can give thousands of yogic practices, there is almost no limit, but if you don't practise, then we will be wasting our time and you will gain absolutely nothing, only a mind full of technical details. You must not remain only a reader; you must transform yourself into a practitioner. In fact, with regard to yoga you should do one percent reading and ninety nine percent practising. Only then can you tap the source of your being and gain the knowledge that cannot be contained in any book.

Kriya Yoga (Part 1)

Kriya yoga is a system that has always been taught directly by guru to disciple. We are actually breaking this tradition by publishing the techniques of kriya yoga in written form. However, we feel that this break with tradition is justified and even necessary in the present world, where so many people are trying to understand themselves, the world and their place in the scheme of life, yet lack positive guidance. Many people are ready for an advanced system of yoga, yet lack a guru to teach them. For this reason and for these people, we are printing comprehensive details of the techniques of kriya yoga.

Little needs to be said about kriya yoga; the practices speak for themselves. Throughout the third book we will purposely write as little as possible. We will intentionally try to confine our explanations to the mechanics of each kriya (technique). The less we write, the happier we will be. This will allow you, the practitioner, to do your practices with an uncluttered mind, reasonably free of preconceptions and misconceptions.

The following text is an introduction to kriya yoga. Read it carefully. This text will act as your teacher. Many questions will arise throughout your practices. In the past, these problems were solved by the guru while giving personal instructions to his disciples. Any faults were corrected on the spot. In the following lessons you will not be guided personally, therefore you must take care to follow the instructions that we give exactly. We suggest that you reread this text from time to time so that you can correct any faults in your practice that were not previously very obvious.

Right attitude is an essential part of kriya yoga; it leads to full blossoming of the potential contained within the kriya yoga practices. A wrong attitude stunts and prevents this blossoming. If you plant a seed in rich soil it will quickly grow and give forth a beautiful flower and fragrance. If the seed is planted in

the wrong soil or in the wrong place, it will fail to sprout. The potential within the seed is the same in both cases; it is the environment that encourages or prevents growth and expression of inner potential. It is similar with kriya yoga; a positive environment of right attitude allows the practices to give forth their fruit; an incorrect attitude prevents this. The potential of the kriyas is ever the same, therefore you should try to adopt the basic attitudes of non-expectation, effortlessness, etc. that we have described in the following pages.

Problems and doubts will arise both in your practices and as a consequence of the practices. If necessary you can write to the ashram for advice. Each person will have their own specific questions, uncertainties and difficulties.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *kriya* means 'action' or 'movement'. *Kriya yoga* is so called because it is a system where one intentionally rotates one's attention along fixed pathways. This movement of awareness is done, however, with control. Also, kriya yoga is so called because one moves the body into specified mudras, bandhas and asanas according to a fixed scheme of practice.

The word *kriya* is often translated as meaning 'practical'. This is indeed a good definition, for kriya yoga is indeed practical. It is concerned solely with practice, without the slightest philosophical speculation. The system is designed to bring results, not merely to talk about them.

Sometimes the word *kriya* is translated as 'preliminary'. This too is a good definition, for kriya yoga is a preliminary practice that leads first to dharana and then eventually to the transcendental state of dhyana (meditation) and yoga (union). It is a technique which has been designed to lead to that state of being which is beyond all techniques. Finally, the word *kriya* is used to describe each individual

practice. Thus the process of kriya yoga consists of a number of kriyas each being done one after the other in a fixed sequence.

History and scriptural references

There is no history of kriya yoga to tell. Its beginnings and development lie lost in the ancient past. It is a system that has remained so secret that there is not even a myth to explain its origin. Actually we are happy that there is no history of kriya yoga to relate. This prevents the system becoming corrupted and twisted by irrelevant details. By remaining stripped bare of all superficialities, kriya yoga preserves its purity and its power to bring results. Most other systems of yoga are associated with a definite history and/or myth; stories and legends tell of different people who formulated the system or modified it, which can become a distraction. People become excessively concerned with who invented the system, when he lived, who influenced his thoughts, his beliefs, religion and so forth. People become so concerned with history that they forget practice is the purpose and essence of all yogic paths. Therefore, the lack of history of kriya yoga is, for us, one of the wonderful things about it. It allows the techniques of kriya yoga to be, applicable to all ages and all types of people, without being tied down to the beliefs and traditions of a specific era. It allows kriya yoga to remain a timeless system.

Of history, all we will say is that kriya yoga was passed on by Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh. It was transmitted in a matter of fifteen to twenty minutes and was retained. If anyone cares to trace the succession of gurus previous to Swami Sivananda they may find a clue to the history of kriya yoga, but this is certainly an impossible task, for sannyasins of the past had a habit of fading into their environment and escaping the pens of historians. Of course, there are various other groups of people in India who have practised and taught kriya yoga. For example, Swami Yogananda, Yuktishwar Giri, Lahiri Mahasaya, Mahatma Gandhi and so forth practised kriya yoga. In fact, a thriving organization still propagates it throughout the world. They also do not know the origin of kriya yoga, but they say that it was reintroduced by the great yogi Babaji as the ideal practice for sincere seekers of wisdom in the present Kali Yuga (Dark Age).

Kriya yoga seems to be the only widely known yogic path that is not directly mentioned in traditional scriptures. Many texts use the word kriya or even kriya yoga, but in a different context. For example, in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali it says: "Kriya yoga comprises tapas (austerity), swadhyaya (self study) and ishwara pranidhana (resignation to the cosmic will)." (2:1) This has nothing to do with the kriya yoga that we will teach in this book. The form mentioned by Patanjali is intended as a preliminary means to harmonize a person's life in preparation for raja yoga.

Kriya yoga is also mentioned in the *Uddhava Gita* of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*. Krishna describes what he called kriya yoga in response to a request by his disciple Uddhava. It involves ritualistic worship of one's deity with flowers, food, etc. together with specific mantras, consecration of the deity and so forth. It has no connection with the kriya yoga that we will teach.

Various texts mention parts of kriya yoga, but never in much detail. Texts such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Shiva Samhita* and so forth give specific details regarding asanas, mudras and bandhas, many of which are part of kriya yoga, but they are not integrated together as they are in kriya yoga. The *Kularnava Tantra* is a very practical text which explains ajapa japa in some detail; this is a part of kriya yoga, but nowhere is kriya yoga mentioned specifically. The same applies to a number of other texts; they hint, but never give details.

Kriya yoga seems to have been known in China, for a system which is vaguely similar is mentioned in a scripture called the *Tai Chin Hua Tzang Chih* (The Secret of the Golden Flower). This text has been translated into English by Richard Wilhelm with an introduction by Carl Jung. It describes the practice of rotating one's awareness through the back and front psychic passages of the body, though the rotation is in the opposite direction to that of kriya yoga practised in India. We are not saying that the Chinese system and the Indian are the same, only that they have similarities.

It is interesting to note that China developed its own unique, dynamic meditative system called Tai Chi Chuan. Though kriya yoga and Tai Chi Chuan seem to have little in common from outside appearance, their fundamental

aim is the same. Both are methods which induce meditation by bringing about perfect balance and harmony of the physical, bioplasmic and mental body. Both use flows of prana combined with heightened awareness.

All we can say is that kriya yoga is a secret technique that has been whispered down the ages by word of mouth from guru to disciple.

Purpose of kriya yoga

The purpose of kriya yoga is to transform your whole life into a continuous expression of joy, bliss and wisdom. It is designed to transform tamas into sattwa. It is intended to refine your whole being. We can say that kriya yoga brings about the following changes:

1. Slowly whittles away fears, phobias, conflicts, depressions, false ideas, conditioning, etc. hidden in the depths of the subconscious mind. Kriya yoga harmonizes the whole mind from the surface layers to the depths.
2. Induces twenty-four hours a day relaxation; not a lazy relaxation, but dynamic relaxation where one can spontaneously do much more work than at present and with much more power and effectiveness.
3. Allows one to explore and know the mind and go beyond.
4. Induces dhyana and intensifies spontaneous awareness.

These changes, brought about progressively, will transmute one's body-mind into a perfect instrument of action and wisdom.

The channelling of energy

Kriya yoga is a method, a very sophisticated method, of harmonizing and synchronizing the natural forces and energies of one's being. The prominent aspects of one's personality are channelled so that they flow in positive directions without suppression. Whether you are predominantly emotional, intellectual, peaceful, aggressive or whatever, the energies can be channelled into positive directions.

The physical, psychic and mental forces are brought into line with each other so that they flow together in a constant, powerful stream making one very sensitive to the deeper aspects of one's inner nature. One starts to vibrate, to resonate with underlying forces, which leads to a subtle perception, unknown before.

Take an analogy. Floods arise naturally in certain seasons of the year. The flood water

tends to flow along the easiest channel and direction available. The innate energy of the water eventually takes it to the sea. If ducts, dams, canals and so forth are built, together with turbo-electrical machinery, then the same energy can be used for constructive purposes. Electrical energy can be generated; fields can be irrigated. There is no change in the amount of energy available – it is merely transformed by a suitable method into a new, more refined form.

Kriya yoga brings about the same change within the human framework. Kriya yoga merely uses, refines and channels the already existing energy for the awakening of one's being. Nothing new is produced, rather that which is already there is allowed to blossom and unfold.

Kriya yoga is a method of transmutation. It is a method of alchemy. It is the philosopher's stone, or at least one of them. It transmutes base metal into gold – the gross, unrefined state of individual being is transmuted into its pure, radiant and natural state.

While doing kriya yoga, the aspirant becomes a *mandala* (psychic magnet) . . . a focus for more subtle energies. His whole being becomes a magnifying glass. And this mandala leads to the central core of his inner world.

Subtlety of perception

All the systems of yoga are intended to develop subtle and direct perception. Jnana yoga does this through concentrated effort to answer an overwhelming enquiry. Bhakti yoga does it by making the emotional forces one-pointed. Mantra yoga does it by constant awareness of a mantra. Kriya yoga brings about subtle perception by harmonizing the forces of the entire body and mind, which leads directly to refinement of perception.

Through the practice of kriya yoga one starts to perceive the deeper aspects of one's nature – the *prana shakti* emanating from the underlying substratum of consciousness. One dives deep to see where the endless phenomena of the mind originate. One watches the thought bubbles arising from the primordial depths. The mind is normally like a murky pond, where the source of ascending bubbles cannot be seen. The source can only be seen by diving into the water and closely surveying the bottom. It is the same with the

mind, one must develop subtle perception, dive deep into the mind and closely survey the source of thought bubbles. The modern Indian mystic, Sri Dattabal said: "When you develop true sensitivity, the whole world will be an open book to you, revealing on each page new secrets and wonderful knowledge."

Thus subtle perception of one's being will bring about a total change in one's attitude and understanding of the outside world. Therefore, those who seek wisdom should begin to practise kriya yoga, preferably combined with other forms of yoga.

The master plan

The practices of kriya yoga follow a specific plan and can be divided into three distinct groups. These groups combined together systematically induce:

1. *Pratyahara* (sense withdrawal)
2. *Dharana* (concentration)
3. *Dhyana* (meditation)

The first techniques are designed to induce pratyahara, the second group induce dharana; this leads to dhyana, which is actually beyond all techniques. This whole process is progressive and natural, without any strain and frustration. It is essential to induce a spontaneous outflow of dhyana. For this reason we will describe the process in more detail.

Pratyahara: From the day we are born we are conditioned to remain concerned only with the outside world and to believe that it is the only reality. Our whole motivation is directed to external experience. As a result it becomes difficult to internalize one's awareness. This is the first block in advanced yoga and it is a difficult block to overcome. Habits are easy to pick up but difficult to eradicate.

The mind is conditioned to continually receive and react to data coming from the outer world. The mind is tuned to external stimuli and, since these external stimuli are continuously impinging on our senses, the mind is always busy. It is ever in a state of turmoil. The process of pratyahara is intended to stop this process by disconnecting one's awareness from the sense organs. This brings about an internalization of awareness.

The mind is like a naughty child: it does the opposite of what you want. Therefore, it has been found by the experience of many people that excessive effort to forget the outside

surroundings leads to the opposite result. That is, applied effort to forget the outside world leads to an increase in external perception. This often leads to frustration and many people give up their attempt to introspect.

Kriya yoga is designed to overcome this problem in a unique yet obvious manner: it enters the house of the mind by the back door. In the first group of kriyas no attempt is made to curb or cut off external sense stimuli. In fact the eyes, which receive the largest amount of external stimuli, are purposely kept open for some time in the earlier kriyas. This seems to contradict logic, but it brings results. It induces internalization of awareness. One does each kriya, allows internal stimulation to arise – and lo and behold, the unexpected happens: after some time one's awareness becomes introverted spontaneously. Kriya yoga achieves a state of pratyahara by cunning means.

Cutting off external sense stimuli, however, brings its own problems; it easily leads to the opposite extreme – total absorption in inner thought processes and psychic realms. People are conditioned in such a way that their awareness must always be absorbed or entangled in something. Therefore, disconnection of one's awareness from the outside world leads to absorption and identification with the inner processes of the mind. One starts to brood over personal problems, fear, conflicts, or becomes attached to beautiful psychic scenery. This is like a bee that pulls itself free from sticky honey on the inside of a jar only to fly into the honey on the opposite surface of the jar. Freedom from one extreme leads to entanglement in the opposite extreme. Each is as bad as the other. Thus disentanglement from external stimulation of the mind can easily lead to internal involvement. Both have to be avoided if one wants success in yoga practice.

Many people try to meditate. They close their eyes, manage to forget the outside world, but immediately become overwhelmed by subconscious thoughts and psychic visions. This is not a bad thing in the early stages of yoga practice. In fact it is necessary since it helps to exhaust negative disturbing *samskaras* from the subconscious mind. But eventually one must prevent awareness becoming abducted by both the events of the outside world and the processes of the inner psychic and mental realms. That is, one must

tread the razor's edge between ida and pingala – the path of sushumna¹. In order to induce pratyahara one must be firmly fixed on the sushumna path, lost neither in the ida nor pingala dimension of being. This leads to real pratyahara and eventually to dharana. Without mastery of pratyahara it is impossible to induce dharana.

The incredible sophistication of kriya yoga is that it brings a balance between total external awareness (outer distraction) and total inner haziness, where one lapses into a dreamy reverie or psychic picture show. It automatically leads to sushumna awareness. In the early practices, as already explained, the eyes are kept open for sometime and then closed for some time. This allows one's awareness to tread the middle path; the closed eyes tend to induce introspection and the open eyes tend to induce extroversion. Eventually this can lead to a balance point and intense dharana arises automatically. This becomes the gateway to dhyana.

In most yoga practices, one tends to close the eyes during meditative practice. This easily leads to a dreamlike state, especially with beginners. Some systems, such as Zen Buddhism, try to overcome this introversion tendency by doing meditative practices with the eyes open. This too presents problems to beginners, for one is continually distracted by the outside world. Kriya yoga strikes a balance between the two extremes: the eyes are kept closed for a short time then opened for a short time. For this reason it brings fantastic results. It systematically and quickly induces pratyahara and leads directly to dharana.

Dharana: After performing and completing the initial group of kriyas, there is a likelihood that you may be in a state of pratyahara. The induction of pratyahara depends on regularity and intensity of practice, as well as the state of turmoil or calmness in your mind. Pratyahara can be easily and automatically induced in a calm mind, whereas a disturbed mind will require more regular practice over a period of months. Also induction of pratyahara depends on auspiciousness. That is, one day it may arise, on another it may not. This is one reason why you should be regular in your practices; on one auspicious day, because of favourable circumstances, you might be launched into a state of dharana and dhyana. It can occur

at a most unexpected time. It can never be predicted.

When pratyahara practices are finished then the eyes are kept closed. Ideally, at this stage most internal and external disturbances should have faded away. The second group of kriyas is then practised to induce dharana. This is done gradually by first of all rotating awareness throughout the inner psychic circuits. This slowly induces more perception. As the kriya practice progresses, one's awareness is confined more and more so that it becomes increasingly one-pointed. Dharana arises spontaneously.

The distinctive feature of kriya yoga is that concentration is not forced; it spontaneously arises as a consequence of performing the mechanics of the kriyas. Often concentration is forced during meditative practices which leads the individual nowhere, only to a headache and frustration. Many people grit their teeth, tense their facial muscles and fight their mind in an effort to bring about concentration. They do this because they know that concentration is an essential part of higher yoga practices, and that if they can attain high states of concentration then they will induce dhyana, but dhyana must be spontaneous. Forced concentration is not really concentration; it creates tension in the mind, which leads away from the path to dhyana. Practise kriya yoga and concentration will arise. Dharana leads to dhyana.

Dhyana: We have nothing to say about dhyana, for it is the realm of the unspeakable. When it is known, no words are needed. Before it is experienced words will only cause confusion, misconception and over-intellectualization. It is better to say nothing. There are no techniques for dhyana; all the techniques of kriya yoga are intended to bring about the state of dhyana.

It is a continuous flow from pratyahara to dharana to dhyana. There is no rigid division as we have given; this classification has been given for ease of explanation. Don't take the classification too seriously. If you master kriya yoga to a reasonable degree then you will automatically flow from one state to the next. You will not need to think: "Ah yes, I must start dharana" and so forth. Everything will happen spontaneously. All you have to do is practise the kriyas in the correct manner.

The tools of kriya yoga

Each individual kriya is comprised of a number of subsidiary techniques. These are the basic tools of kriya yoga. Many of these subsidiary techniques are widely known and practised individually. They can be classified into the following groups:

1. *Asana* (physical pose)
2. *Mudra* (external expression of an inner attitude)
3. *Bandha* (physio-psychic locks)
4. *Mantra* (special sound pattern which can produce subtle impact and change)
5. *Pranayama* (manipulation of breath to control prana)
6. Psychic passage awareness

These six groups of techniques are the building blocks of the kriyas. They are combined together in a scientific and specific manner in order to bring about changes in one's being. These changes induce the process of pratyahara, dharana and dhyana that we have just discussed. Individual practice of these subsidiary techniques can have powerful influences on the physical-psychic-mental body. It was discovered by ancient yogis that integration, synchronization and the blending of specific techniques can lead to a vast increase of the power of the techniques when done individually. These yogi geniuses discovered this fact through personal experience and were the founders of kriya yoga. It is these unique combinations that make kriya yoga such a powerful system.

Let us briefly describe these subsidiary techniques:

Asanas: These are specific positions of the physical body. In kriya yoga they are mostly sitting poses. Without a steady comfortable position it is impossible to induce pratyahara. It is necessary to master the relevant asanas so that they are comfortable to assume and maintain and are not a continual source of discomfort and distraction.

Mudras: These are special physical positions of the body which induce specific physiological, psychic and mental changes in one's being. Mudras often involve the use of bandhas and pranayama, and the internal rotation of awareness through certain specific psychic passages.

Bandhas: These are physical locks which tighten and contract specific parts of the body.

They are associated with breath retention and concentration on specific regions of the body. Beside the physical influences, they also induce profound psychic and mental changes in the human framework. They are especially powerful in inducing control of the pranic forces of the body².

Mantras: there are a vast number of mantras, each with a specific power. Two mantras are used in two early kriyas.

Pranayama: in the first group of kriyas concerned with pratyahara, pranayama is widely used as a means to harmonize pranic forces in the body. The flow of breath is integrated with the psychic passage awareness. In later kriyas, the more subtle form of pranayama, namely ujjayi, is widely used. This is a great help in inducing pratyahara and dharana.

Psychic passage awareness: this is a vital aspect of kriya yoga practice. It is due to the subtle perception of ancient yogis that the significance of psychic passages became known. The science of prana was especially developed in India and China. In China it resulted in such a subtle science as acupuncture. In India it led to the development of pranayama and prana vidya (the science of prana flow).

In kriya yoga, awareness is rotated along specific pathways of the body. This in turn induces changes in the pranic and psychic flow patterns of the body. This harmonized flow pattern influences the more subtle aspects of one's being and greatly helps to induce pratyahara and dharana.

These six types of techniques are the basic tools of kriya yoga. Individually they are very powerful physio-psychic-psychological instruments. When they are combined they become irresistible yogic bulldozers. They all act in very subtle ways in the pranic and mental body. They transmute one's being into a sensitive yet powerful instrument of perception.

Sequence and duration

Each kriya has an intimate relationship with the preceding and subsequent kriyas. Each kriya influences the other kriyas in a specific manner, therefore the order in which they are practised is most important. If they are done in the wrong order, then kriya yoga will either fail to produce results or, even worse, it may lead to negative results. The correct order of

practice allows the mind-body to be systematically balanced; incorrect order of practice may lead to imbalance. Therefore, we urge you to practise the kriyas in the given order.

Each kriya also has a fixed duration or number of rounds. These durations may seem arbitrary but in fact they have been found to be the ideal durations for optimum results. Remember: kriya yoga is the result of hundreds, even thousands of years of experimentation by countless yogis. Nothing in the system is arbitrary. Therefore, try to practise each kriya for the prescribed duration: no less, no more and in the correct sequence.

Attitude and effortlessness

While doing the kriya yoga practices one should have the attitude of trying, but without trying, doing without doing. This is not easy, but this attitude will bring the greatest results. One must not be too attached to the method, yet one must take care that the kriyas are done correctly.

Kriya yoga should be done for the joy of doing the kriyas; if it becomes too much of a burden and a chore, then it is difficult to practise and obtain the best results. Try to integrate the kriya practices into your daily life like other daily activities. They should become a habit. A person takes breakfast without effort or strain. Few people eat their breakfast grudgingly or unwillingly; they eat with hunger and enthusiasm. Practice of kriya yoga should be the same. You should look forward to the daily practice program. At times this will be difficult, especially when there are many problems in the mind, but this is the ideal attitude – enthusiasm and joy in your practice.

If you can adopt the attitude of purposelessness through purpose and effortlessness through effort, then you are on the right track. Try not to have the strong feeling of being the doer. Let the kriyas ‘happen’ through your mandala being.

Non-expectation

Non-expectation leads on directly from the previous heading where we tried to convey the idea of purpose without purpose. You should try to practise kriya yoga without the feeling of expectation. Again this is not easy, but you should try. There should be regularity

of practice with minimum expectation of results or experiences. If you are devotionally inclined, then you can do the kriyas as a form of worship; if you are not devotionally inclined, then you can do the kriyas for their own sake. In the *Uddhava Gita* of the *Srimad Bhagavatam* it says: “Worship done without expectation of reward is sattwic; that done with expectation is rajasic; and that done with the intention of harming others is tamasic.” (ch. 25) Try to do your kriya yoga practices with the sattwic attitude of non-expectation. The sadhana can be done as a form of worship or not, it does not matter, but try not to expect.

Dhyana is not created . . . it happens. It occurs spontaneously when the mind is free of grasping and egotistical motivation. Expectation creates tension in the mind, which prevents dhyana.

Try not to intellectualize the practices. This will hamper the transforming power of kriya yoga acting on you. Just practise and the answers will come in their own time, and do not worry too much whether you are making progress or not, just do all the practices regularly. The less you expect, the quicker you will reach. Just let things happen in the way that they will. The moment you stop waiting and feel perfectly relaxed and receptive is the moment that dhyana will arise spontaneously. When you are empty, you will be filled to the brim.

You can tread the path of belief or non-belief; it does not matter, but there should be no expectation of spiritual experience, for expectation means ego and the ego does not allow dhyana to arise. Where there is ego there can never be meditation, just as there can never be night where there is day. They mutually prevent each other. So do your kriya yoga sadhana with regularity and intensity but without any expectation. Expect nothing and you will gain everything, and more³.

Notes

¹ For further details on sushumna refer to Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

³ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 2

Kriya Yoga: Preparation and Rules

Because kriya yoga has always been a secret technique, it has always been practised under the close guidance of an expert. In this book there is no personal guide. All the guidance is given in these pages, therefore it is essential that you carefully follow the rules and preparations as closely as possible.

GENERAL PREPARATIONS AND RULES

Diet

Try to eat vegetarian food that is fresh, clean and easily digestible, also try to eat in moderation. Kriya yoga is a system of purifying the whole mind-body. If there is excessive impurity in your body then there will be a drastic purging process. Too much food will make it difficult to do the practices properly, especially breathing practices, and kriyas which involve uddiyana bandha etc. You must use your own discrimination in choosing the food you eat. Remember: all full-time kriya yoga courses in this ashram are accompanied by compulsory food restrictions, so try to adopt sensible eating habits.

Dhyana is a sattvic state; it cannot take place in a tamasic state of mind and body. It is therefore essential to adjust one's dietary habits so that the food is pure, easily digestible and less. When the body is more gross it can easily tolerate mistreatment without immediate adverse reaction, but as sensitivity increases, as it certainly will through regular kriya yoga practice, so mistreatment in gross ways will quickly bring adverse repercussions. The ancient yogis classified the different levels of man into five types: earth, water, fire, air and ether. These five elements represent the progressive levels of sensitivity. Those at the earth level can eat enormous amounts of heavy food without consequence, but if the same food is taken by a person at the air or ether level, then digestive problems or illness can easily result. Take an analogy: if you put

dirty oil into a new car engine it will quickly lose efficiency. Clean oil must be used. Dirty oil used in an old battered car will also take its toll, but the negative results will be much less obvious. It is the same with food and the body. One must use clean food of a suitable quality and in reasonable amounts. So if your food habits need to be changed then you must begin to gradually modify them, if you want to practise kriya yoga. This applies more and more as you progressively practise a greater number of kriyas.

Illness

If you suffer from any serious physical illness, then we strongly suggest that you do not begin kriya yoga at this stage. First of all take steps to cure your illness by adopting any suitable healing systems, possibly hatha yoga. Don't attempt kriya yoga, for it may easily worsen the condition. If necessary seek expert guidance on the best method of curing your ailment.

If you are currently suffering from any serious mental upset do not start to practise kriya yoga. Certainly you should practise other forms of yoga, since they will gradually bring harmony into your mind. Kriya yoga is a supercharged system; it is very strong medicine and may worsen or heighten mental disturbances at this stage¹. The fundamental requirement for the practice of kriya yoga is sound health.

Preparation of mind and body

If you have not practised other types of yoga, then we strongly suggest that you do not begin kriya yoga at this stage. First of all you must harmonize mind and body by practising some of the techniques previously described in Books I and II. You should start to practise yoga regularly following the suggested practice program in each lesson.

Mastery of preparatory techniques

Before beginning kriya yoga you should have developed a reasonable degree of sensitivity to those parts of the body used in kriya yoga techniques. In particular, you should be able to mentally and physically feel and locate the chakra and kshetram trigger points associated with mooladhara, swadhisthana, etc. During the last six lessons we have described specific techniques for developing sensitivity to these centres². You should be able to locate these centres at will, without excessive effort. Before attempting to practise kriya yoga, you should be familiar with the meditative technique of ajapa japa³. We do not advise you to begin kriya yoga until you have practised all these techniques for a reasonable period of time, preferably six months should have been given over to these preparatory practices.

Without mastery of these basic techniques, you will find many of the kriya yoga techniques very difficult. You will be unable to do them properly. Those people who have been following the course closely, with regular practice, as prescribed over the previous two books, will be adequately prepared to start kriya yoga sadhana. Without adequate preparation, you may possibly harm yourself.

SPECIFIC RULES OF PRACTICE

The following rules and recommendations apply directly to the actual practice of kriya yoga.

Cold wash

It is very easy to lapse into a state of drowsiness during your practice; in fact, if your mind is not accustomed to early rising, then you may easily fall asleep during the practice. You may have pleasant dreams but it will not lead you anywhere on the yogic path. One good method of reducing the likelihood of falling asleep is to take a cold shower before beginning your practice. If it is too cold, then you should at least wash your face with cold water. If you feel sleepy during your practice, we strongly suggest that you again wash your face with cold water, or take another shower.

Place of practice

Try to practise in the same place every day. In this way you will gradually build up an

atmosphere of positivity. Your place of practice should be clean and peaceful. It should be well ventilated but not swept by gale force winds. It should be dry and not too hot or cold. Do not practise on the bare floor; place a blanket beneath you. All the kriyas after the first one are done in a sitting pose; therefore, if the atmosphere is cold you can wrap a warm blanket around you. If it is excessively warm we do not advise you to practise under a fan as this is the quickest way to catch a cold. In hot climates such as India, you should ensure that you practise early in the morning when the atmosphere is reasonably cool.

If you live in a country where there are many insects, such as mosquitoes, you should make sure that you are protected by a sheet or blanket. Again it is only the first kriya that precludes the use of a blanket. If you have a sufficiently large mosquito net, we see no reason why you should not practise all the kriyas after the first one under the net, but there should not be the slightest contact between the body and net. This is important.

Clothing

Let your clothing be as light and as loose as the prevailing climate will allow. Do not wear tight clothes for this will interfere with free breathing.

Light

The kriyas should not be done in darkness. There should be some form of light, otherwise it is not possible to do the kriyas properly. Remember: many of the initial kriyas are done partly with the eyes open. If it is pitch black, what is the advantage and purpose of opening the eyes? Some of the kriyas require you to gaze at the nose tip or gaze upwards at the eyebrow centre; it is not possible to do this properly in darkness.

Nasal cleansing

It is very difficult to practise kriyas if the nose is blocked. If you have time available, and if it is necessary, we suggest you clean your nose by doing jala neti before the kriyas⁴.

Loosening up and preparation

If you have the time, practise surya namaskara and a few asanas immediately before starting the kriya yoga practices⁵. This will flush the

whole body with a good blood flow, loosen up stiff joints and induce optimum relaxation.

Sitting position

For most kriyas, the ideal asanas are padmasana and siddhasana (siddha yoni asana for females)⁶. If you cannot sit in either of these asanas, you can adopt alternative sitting asanas which we will describe as we introduce each individual kriya in turn.

You should try to adopt the habit of keeping the back as straight as possible, but without strain. In this erect position it is far easier to locate the chakra and kshetram trigger points and to maintain awareness of rotation through these centres via the psychic pathways. If one sits with the back slumped forward one will easily fall asleep.

Awareness

At first your attention may wander everywhere; everywhere, that is, except on the practice. Do not worry; let the attention wander and let the thoughts arise. Do not suppress them, but watch them carefully while maintaining awareness of the practice. Eventually the bubbling thoughts will subside and your mind will become one-pointed. You must only persevere with your practice.

You must develop the habit of regularly checking that you are maintaining awareness of the practice and that you are not totally lost in a haze of thoughts. This checking procedure will arise automatically when you change over from one kriya to the next.

Interruption of practice

If you have to go to the toilet midway through your practice, try not to get distracted by any outer events, and avoid talking. Fix your awareness on the movement of the body, breathing, or a mantra until you return.

If you feel stiff during your practice, it is better to interrupt the practice and loosen up the body.

Regularity

Try to practise every day without fail. Even if your mind is in a state of turmoil, even if your attention jumps here and there like a wild monkey, still try to carry on your daily practice program. Only stop your practice if you become ill.

You should make a strong resolve that you will practise kriya yoga every day, through thick and thin, without fail. Before you sleep at night make a strong resolve that you will get up in the morning and do the practices.

It is only by regular daily practice that you will reap the fruits of kriya yoga. You should make the resolve penetrate the deeper layers of the subconscious mind by repeating it with intensity, feeling and sincerity. If the resolve is planted in the subconscious, then it will manifest itself by making the body follow the dictates of the resolve. That is, your body and mind will wake up at a fixed time every morning and you will persevere with the practice.

Notes

¹ We suggest that you refer to the previous discussion entitled Removal of Mental Problems:

Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 2; Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 2; Part 3 – Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 1

² Mooladhara chakra – Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2; Swadhisthana chakra – Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3; Manipura chakra – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3; Anahata chakra – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2; Vishuddhi chakra – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3; Ajna chakra – Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5;

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 1: VIPAREETA KARANI MUDRA (INVERTED PSYCHIC ATTITUDE)

The Sanskrit word *vipareeta* means 'inverted'; *karani* means 'to get done'; and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'; therefore, the English translation of this kriya is the 'inverted psychic attitude'. In the scriptures, this practice is sometimes called 'vipareeta kari mudra' with the same meaning.

Scriptural references

Vipareeta karani mudra is one of the few kriyas mentioned in various traditional tantra-yoga texts. The most comprehensive description is given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as follows: "The secretion of the moon (bindu), the nectar of immortality (amrit), is normally consumed by the fire of the sun (manipura chakra). It flows downwards and results in ageing of the body. There is a wonderful technique which can reverse this process; it should be learned from a guru and can never be understood by reading even a thousand scriptures. The practice is called vipareeta karani mudra and the positions of the bindu and sun (manipura) are reversed (i.e. the body is inverted). The sun is held upwards and the moon downwards." (v. 77-79)

The bindu is the focal point through which consciousness manifests and expresses itself in all created objects¹. This also applies to man; it is the direct channel, the lifeline of man. It is through the bindu that man is sustained with both energy and bliss. With most people this energy is poorly directed into disharmonious living in the outside world, into selfish and worldly pursuits expressed through the medium of the manipura chakra. This leads to spiritual death. Man loses contact with his source; he lives blindly. Vipareeta karani mudra and indeed all yoga practices reverse this process, so that human awareness is directed once more through the bindu to

the fountainhead of life. That is, awareness increases. This leads to revitalization of one's whole being. It leads to bliss. It leads to wisdom. This is called the *nivritti marga* (the return to the source); the positions of the sun and the moon are reversed. The normal flow of nectar downwards from the moon to the sun represents the *pravritti marga* (the path of worldly activity). This symbolizes the life of most people. In spiritual life this process has to be reversed so that the path of *pravritti* is transformed into *nivritti*. Vipareeta karani mudra symbolizes this process.

Vipareeta karani mudra is not only symbolic. It is a method of transmuting energy from grosser to more subtle forms. For this reason it is included in the kriya yoga sequence.

Rationale

Vipareeta karani mudra is the first of the kriyas in the sequence of kriya yoga for various reasons. One of the most obvious reasons is that it physically induces balance of the ida and pingala breath flows in the nostrils². This balance is vital in spiritual life and should occur on all levels from the physical to the more subtle levels of the mind. In Lesson 23 we described physical methods of inducing balance of the ida and pingala breath flows³. In technique 1, called *padadhirasana* we explained that pressure under the armpits quickly and effectively induces the required ida-pingala balance. Vipareeta karani mudra brings about the same result in the final pose, since the arms are compressed in order to support the weight of the inverted body. This balance of the breath flow through the two nostrils is essential in meditative practices for it helps one to tread the narrow razor's edge between excessive introversion and absorption in the psychic world (ida) and the opposite extreme, distraction in the outside world (pingala). If you practise vipareeta karani mudra you will

find out for yourself that the breath flows are indeed rapidly balanced. When this balance is achieved, then the subsequent kriyas become much more powerful.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* continues: “Regular practice of vipareeta karani mudra increases the digestive fire; therefore, the sadhaka (practitioner) must have extra food available. If the diet is insufficient then the increased digestive fire will reduce the body.” (v. 80, 81) This is a warning that applies to all kriya yoga practices. One must be careful with diet⁴. In the above quotation, a warning is given that the metabolic rate may increase; therefore, it may be necessary to increase your food quantity to prevent loss of weight. The reader should use his discrimination and regulate his food input according to prevailing needs.

“In the beginning, the body should be inverted for only a short duration. The duration can be slowly increased day by day. After six months of daily practice wrinkles and white hair will disappear.” (v. 82) This advice is more relevant for long periods of practice such as half an hour, one hour, etc. In kriya yoga there is a fixed time, which should not be exceeded.

The vipareeta karani mudra in the scriptures is not specifically intended to be a part of kriya yoga. It is given only as a technique.

Another reason for practising vipareeta karani mudra first is that it increases wakefulness. That is, the inversion of the body directs an extra blood supply to the brain and increases alertness. One is then able to do the following kriyas more correctly, with greater awareness and without falling asleep. Vipareeta karani mudra acts on the brain in a similar manner to sirshasana, though the effect is less extreme⁵.

Body position

The body should be inverted as shown in the accompanying picture.

Place a blanket on the floor.

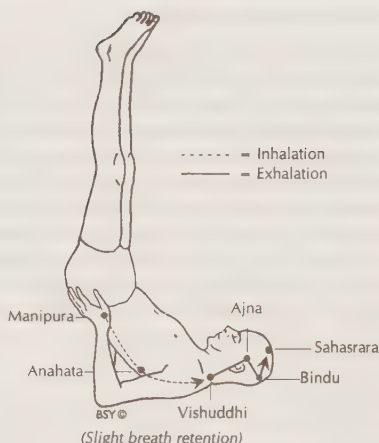
Lie flat on your back with legs straight and together.

Place the arms straight beside the body, palms up.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe in deeply and then raise both legs, keeping them straight and together.

Let the legs move over the top of the head.



Then, pressing the arms against the floor, raise the buttocks off the ground and push the legs further over the head.

Bend the arms and place the hands at the hips. Let the trunk be supported by the arms.

Raise the legs so that they are vertical.

Keep the eyes closed and relax the whole body as much as possible.

This is the body pose for the practice of vipareeta karani mudra.

Note: Unlike sarvangasana the chin should not press against the chest in the final pose⁶.

Position of hands

At first you may find it difficult to maintain the final body pose for the full duration of the kriya practice. Your hands will probably start to ache. With practice this problem will not arise; until this point, however, you should adjust yourself and your hands whenever it is necessary.

The usual method of supporting the body in the inverted pose is to rest the hips between the thumb and fingers of each hand. After a short while the hands begin to ache. A better method of supporting the body is to let the top of the hips rest on the palms of the hands. That is, the hands act as a cup for the hips, with the hips resting on the base of the palms, near the wrist. This position is clearly shown in the accompanying picture. This hand position will help you to stay in the final pose for the full period of the kriya without experiencing excessive pain and discomfort.

Subsidiary techniques

You should be fully familiar with ujjayi pranayama in order to practise vipareeta karani mudra⁷. You should also have developed sensitivity to the manipura, vishuddhi and ajna trigger points, preferably having done the associated techniques⁸.

In the practice you will have to locate the bindu trigger point at the back of the head⁹, and you will also have to direct your attention to the sahasrara trigger point. This is symbolically found at the centre of the crown of the head and is quite easy to locate mentally¹⁰.

Technique

Assume the inverted pose of the body.

Make the legs perfectly vertical.

Close the eyes.

Relax the body as much as possible.

Practise ujjayi pranayama.

Fix your awareness at the manipura chakra trigger point in the spine; this is the starting point of the first round.

While inhaling try to feel the flow of prana moving from the manipura chakra to the vishuddhi chakra. You should imagine this prana moving through the spinal passage as a hot smooth stream of amrit (nectar).

Let the nectar collect at vishuddhi chakra.

Hold the breath for a few seconds and feel the nectar becoming cool at vishuddhi.

Then exhale and feel the prana moving from vishuddhi through ajna and bindu in turn so that it eventually reaches sahasrara.

You should feel that the prana is being injected through these trigger points by the force of the exhaled breath.

When the prana and awareness reach sahasrara, it is the end of 1 round.

Immediately transfer your awareness back to manipura and repeat a second round.

Do a total of 21 complete rounds.

Then proceed to kriya number 2.

Breathing and psychic passages

You should practise ujjayi pranayama throughout the practice. Inhalation is done in the psychic passage connecting the manipura to the vishuddhi chakra trigger point via the centre of the spine. Retain the breath for a few seconds at vishuddhi. Exhalation is done in the psychic passage passing from vishuddhi via the spine to ajna, then directly back to

bindu and then to sahasrara at the crown of the head. The breath should be synchronized with the flow of prana or amrit through the psychic passages. Breathing should be as slow and as comfortably as possible.

Awareness

Awareness should be fixed on the prana as it passes through the psychic passages and on the trigger points as the prana passes through them. Each round should be mentally counted as your awareness reaches the sahasrara.

Duration

You should practise 21 rounds. The duration will depend on the speed of respiration. An average duration of the practice is about 10 minutes. In the beginning don't practise the full 21 rounds. On the first day of practice do 5 rounds only. Then increase by 1 round every day.

Over-intellectualization

Try not to involve yourself with the intellectual speculations of the practice. Merely do the practice itself and all answers will come in due time.

KRIYA 2: CHAKRA ANUSANDHANA (SEARCH FOR THE CHAKRAS)

This kriya should be done immediately after vipareeta karani mudra. The Sanskrit word *chakra* means 'psychic centre' and *anusandhana* means 'search' or 'discovery'. Therefore, in English this kriya can also be translated as: 'the search for the chakras' or, perhaps better, 'the location of the chakras'.

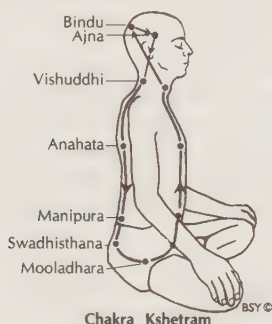
Body position

Assume a comfortable sitting asana. The best asanas are padmasana and siddhasana (siddha yoni asana for women)¹¹. If you find these asanas too difficult or uncomfortable you can sit in ardha padmasana, swastikasana¹¹, or in sukhasana¹².

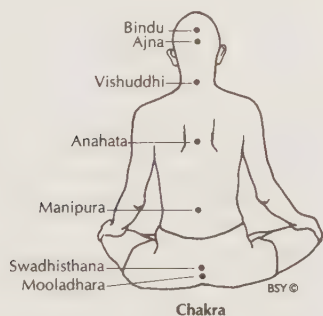
In order not to be distracted by body discomfort, we suggest that you loosen up your leg joints before starting kriya yoga practices, that is, before doing vipareeta karani mudra. A simple yet effective exercise is ardha titali asana (half butterfly)¹³.

Arohan and awarohan psychic passages

In this kriya and a number of subsequent kriyas you will be required to move your awareness through two psychic passages called the *arohan* and the *awarohan*. The path of these passages is as follows:



Arohan is the ascending psychic passage which starts from the mooladhara chakra, travels forwards to the swadhisthana kshetram in the pubic area, then follows the curve of the belly to the manipura kshetram, upwards to the anahata kshetram and vishuddhi kshetram in the front of the throat, then in a straight line to bindu at the back of the head.



Awarohan is the descending passage which starts at bindu, travels forwards to the ajna chakra, then down through the sushumna in the spine, passing through all the chakra trigger points in turn, to terminate at mooladhara.

Arohan and awarohan join each other at bindu and mooladhara. Together they form an irregular shaped psychic circuit in the body, something like a squashed egg. The entire circuit is shown in the top picture.

These two psychic passages are widely known throughout the world, especially in mystical circles. They are used in various types of healing methods. In acupuncture there are two types of pranic passages (meridians) – normal meridians (called sei-ke) and abnormal meridians (called ki-ke). The normal meridians, twelve in number, are used in diagnosis and treatment. The abnormal meridians, eight in number, have no yin-yang interrelationships. The two principal abnormal meridians are called the meridian of conception, running up the front part of the body directly in front of the spine, and the governor meridian, running inside the spine (refer to *Religion and Parapsychology* by Motoyama of Japan). These two meridians correspond exactly with the arohan and awarohan psychic passages of kriya yoga. The front passage is yang, whereas the spinal passage is yin. These principles of yin and yang have deep implications and roughly correspond with the yogic principle of ida and pingala.

In acupuncture, these two meridians are regarded as reservoirs of prana. In the case of disease, the necessary vital energy flows from the corresponding abnormal meridian and brings relief. The vital energy then flows back to the meridian.

These paths are not imaginary, but are actual subtle passages in which prana flows. At first in kriya yoga one may have to imagine the flow, but with practice and the development of more subtle perception, one will actually feel the flow of prana in these passages.

You should fully familiarize yourself with the exact route and location of the arohan and awarohan passages and try to develop sensitivity to them. They are an integral part of chakra anusandhana and a number of subsequent kriyas. One of the aims of kriya yoga is to balance the prana that flows through them.

Technique

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Close the eyes.

Relax the whole body, but keep the spine upright. Breathe normally.

Fix your awareness at the mooladhara chakra trigger point.

This is the starting point for the first round.

Let your awareness ascend the arohan psychic passage (frontal passage).

You should let your awareness pass in turn through the swadhisthana, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi kshetrams until it reaches bindu.

As you pass through each centre, mentally say the name of the centre: mooladhara, swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, bindu.

After reaching bindu you should immediately let your awareness descend through the avarohan passage to mooladhara.

As your awareness passes through each centre mentally say: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

This completes 1 round or circuit of awareness. Immediately begin a second round by moving your awareness upwards through the arohan passage, again mentally saying the name of each centre as you pass through them.

Do not make tense efforts to locate the chakra and kshetram trigger points; just let your awareness flow through the centres without effort.

Try to imagine that each centre is a railway station, and that your awareness is like a train that passes through them without stopping.

The centres should be regarded as if they are part of the psychic scenery.

If you wish you can try to imagine your awareness as a thin silver serpent travelling in an elliptical path within the body.

Do 9 rounds.

Then proceed to kriya number 3¹⁵.

Alternative route of the arohan psychic passage

There is also another pathway for the arohan psychic passage that has been taught by tradition throughout the ages. On the ascent, the awareness is taken from vishuddhi kshetram to the lalana chakra in the palate, then to the nose tip, then to bhrumadhya¹⁴, then follows the curvature of the skull through sahasrara at the crown to bindu at the back of the head. This method is perfectly valid and also follows a natural flow or circuit of subtle prana. If you already practise kriya yoga and use this psychic passage in your kriyas then you should continue to do so. If you are now learning kriya yoga through this book then you can experiment with both passages and find the one you like the best. However, in this course we will generally refer to the arohan

passage as connecting the vishuddhi kshetram directly to bindu in the way explained under the previous heading.

Breathing

Breathing should be normal and not synchronised with the flow of awareness through the psychic passages.

Awareness

The awareness should flow through all the centres in the arohan and avarohan psychic passages, noting each centre and repeating its name as you pass through. Mentally count each round as your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Duration

Practise 9 complete rounds only. An average duration will be about 4 minutes.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5

² For further details on ida and pingala refer to The Balance of Life: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

³ Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 2

⁴ Refer to Topic 3 of this lesson for details on diet

⁵ Sirshasana: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 4; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 3

⁶ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 2

⁷ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁸ Manipura – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3; Vishuddhi – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3; Ajna – Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2

⁹ Refer to Topic 5 of this lesson

¹⁰ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

¹¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

¹² Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

¹³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

¹⁴ Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2

¹⁵ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3



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Bindu

Bindu

The most subtle of the chakras is the ajna. Beyond ajna and even more subtle is *bindu*. It is not a chakra. The chakras are associated with the human psychic framework; bindu, on the other hand, is the subtle centre from which the human framework itself arises. Bindu is therefore the primary manifesting source of the chakras themselves. The chakras are within the realms and fetters of the mind; bindu is beyond the mind.

The subject of bindu may seem very technical, abstract and incomprehensible, but it implies an elevated and profound part of tantra-yoga and other mystical systems. Though it may appear to have little significance in terms of practical yoga, it is the purpose of all yoga practices to induce awareness of the bindu. Actually it is completely inexplicable in terms of logic, for it unites the finite with the infinite. Like the six main chakras, it is completely impossible to understand bindu by discussion, reading or speculation.

Definition

The word *bindu* comes from the Sanskrit root *bind* – ‘to split’, ‘to divide’. This means that the bindu is the origin of individuality; it is the point where the oneness first divides itself to produce duality, the world of multiple forms. This division implies limitation in knowledge, action and so forth.

Bindu implies a point without dimension – a dimensionless centre. In Sanskrit texts it is often called *chidghana*, that which has its roots in the limitless consciousness. The word bindu also means zero or voidness – the shoonya. More correctly, bindu is the gateway to the shoonya. This zero or voidness is not, however, a total nothingness. It is a voidness, an emptiness that contains the fullest potential. In fact, the word shoonya should be translated not as nothingness, but as no-thingness. There is a vast difference between these two words. The state of no-thingness

is pure conscious-ness. Bindu is therefore a mysterious, ineffable focal point where the two opposites – infinity and zero, fullness and nothingness – coexist. Bindu is widely called the *bindu visarga* – ‘the falling drop’. This means that bindu is one of many drops of nectar that continually trickle down from sahasrara, the primal fountainhead. This nectar irrigates life. This nectar is the real ‘water of life’.

In summary we can say that bindu literally means seed, small particle, semen or sperm, a point, dot and so forth. It represents the focal point of individuality, whether animate or inanimate. It is the cosmic seed from which all things manifest and grow. It is an infinitesimally small point of infinite potential.

Evolutionary implications

Here, by evolution, we do not mean scientific or Darwinian evolution, which can be regarded as horizontal evolution in a historical sense. We mean evolution in a vertical, transcendental sense, where life, objects, etc. arise from the underlying substratum. Scientific evolution is in the realm of time; the evolution we are referring to is in the realm of the timeless.

There is an individuating principle that generates the myriads of objects in the universe. In Sanskrit it is called *kala*. This causes the potential inherent in the underlying consciousness to accumulate at a point called the bindu. It is from this point or seed that an object, animal, human being or whatever, can evolve, manifest or grow. Each and every object, big or small, has a bindu as its base. This bindu is *hiranyagarbha* – the golden egg or womb of creation. It is through the bindu that the immanent and the transcendental merge together.

Bindu contains a blueprint of all the characteristics of the object to be evolved. That which previously had no shape assumes shape through the bindu. The nature of the evolved object is fixed by the blueprint of the bindu.

The bindu is both the means of expression of consciousness and also the means of limitations. Some of the objects will be conscious centres, as in the case of man; most centres will be unconscious, such as elements, stones, etc. The faculty to be conscious or unconscious depends only on the nature of the apparatus of the individual object; this is determined by bindu. Man has the apparatus that allows him to be a conscious centre.

Every object, conscious or unconscious, is intimately linked to the very essence of consciousness through the intermediary of the bindu. Every object evolves into material existence through the medium of the bindu; conversely, every object is withdrawn to the source via the bindu. Bindu is a trapdoor that acts in both directions. It is also the means through which certain conscious centres, such as man, can realize the totality of sahasrara, the whole (poorna). There are basically two types of humans: those who are on the pravritti path and those who are on the nivritti path. The pravritti path means that man is looking away from bindu towards the outside world. He is almost entirely motivated by external events. This is the path that most people in the world are now treading. It is the path that leads to bondage and away from self-knowledge. The other path, the nivritti path, is the spiritual path, the path to wisdom. It implies that the individual is starting to face the bindu, that he is starting to tune in with the source of his being. It is this path that leads to freedom.

The path of evolution is the pravritti path of manifestation and extroversion. The path of involution leads back along the path that produced one's individual being; it leads back through bindu to sahasrara. The whole purpose of yoga practice is to direct one's awareness along the path of involution.

The power within the infinitesimal point

Every particle, even the tiniest such as the atom, is the centre of a much greater power than is indicated by its external appearance. Science, especially in recent years, is finding this out to the astonishment of vast numbers of scientists. Those who are familiar with modern research into atomic particles – positrons, neutrons, electrons, protons, neutrinos, psi-particles, mu-mesons, leptons, muons, 'u' particles and a multitude of other

particles – will appreciate how much power is concentrated in these tiny point-sized particles in the space-time continuum. Atomic physics seems to be moving into the realms of the inexplicable.

The degree of intelligence in such organic bodies as DNA molecules, RNA molecules and so on is also an illustration of how much can be condensed into the confines of a small point. The deeper science delves into nature, the more power and complexity it finds. Instead of becoming simpler with decrease in size, tiny particles of the type already mentioned indicate that there is vast potential within each one of them.

The power of the point (bindu) has been known by mystics through the ages. In tantra, each bindu, each particle of manifested existence, is regarded as a centre of power – shakti. Shakti is an expression of the underlying substratum of static consciousness. The aim of tantra is to merge shakti (the individual) with shiva (consciousness). The means to do this is the bindu.

Kabbalists were also very much concerned with bindu. It corresponded to the state of being where one could say: 'I am'. It was called *kether* (the crown) because it occupies the most prominent place in the creation of all things. It was regarded as the link between the manifested and the unmanifested. It was known as the primordial dot, for all things emanated from, or rather, through it.

According to the philosophy of the *Kabbala*, nine sephiroth evolved from the kether (bindu). Together they formed ten sephiroth on the mythical and symbolic tree of life. The nine sephiroth below the kether are chakras (levels of human consciousness). In yoga, only six main chakras are used and discussed, but there are others. Therefore, though there are different numbers of chakras in the two systems, yoga and the *Kabbala*, the light of consciousness and manifestation shines firstly through the kether, then progressively filters down to the other sephiroth (chakras) in turn. This is exactly the same as tantra-yoga, where consciousness shines firstly through bindu then down through the chakras.

In some mystical systems sahasrara, source of all things, is symbolized by a circle. Powers inherent in this circle of infinite potential focus at an infinitesimal point at the centre.

Pascal, the famous mathematician, said: "The supreme is a circle, of which the centre is everywhere and the circumference nowhere."

This centre is the bindu. The centre of bindu is the core of all things, from the sun to an atom. From bindu, objects become manifested into objective reality by expanding outwards to express inherent potential. This potential may be physical, pranic and mental. In the *Zohar*, one of the Kabbalistic scriptures, it says: "When the concealed of the concealed wished to reveal himself, he first of all made a single point; the infinite was entirely unknown, and spread no light until the luminous point violently broke into manifested reality."

Many mystical sects also speak of the macrocosm being reflected and reproduced within the microcosm. This is achieved through the intermediary of the bindu. In spiritual life, the microcosm is man and the macrocosm is consciousness.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this part is to give a vivid description of one person's experience of the power inherent within bindu. The following are two quotations from a book called *Kundalini: the Evolutionary Energy in Man* written by Gopi Krishna: "My body, the chair I was sitting on, the table in front of me, the room enclosed by the walls, the lawn outside and the space beyond, including the earth and sky appeared to be mere phantoms in this real, interpenetrating and all pervasive ocean of existence which, to explain the most incredible part of it as best I can, seemed to be simultaneously unbounded, stretching out immeasurably in all directions, and yet no bigger than an infinitely small point. From this marvellous point, the entire existence, of which my body and its surroundings were a part poured out like radiations as if a reflection as vast as my conception of the cosmos were thrown out upon infinity by a projector no bigger than a pinpoint, the entire intensely active, gigantic world picture dependent on the beams issuing from it."

This point is bindu and is described further: "... my lustrous conscious self is floating, with but an extremely dim idea of the corporeal frame in a vivid bright conscious plane, every fragment of which represents a boundless world of knowledge, embracing the present, past and future, commanding all the sciences, philosophies and arts ever known or that will

be known in the ages to come, all concentrated and contained in a point existing here and everywhere, now and always, a formless, measureless ocean of wisdom from which, drop by drop, knowledge has filtered and will continue to filter into the human brain."

Both of these descriptions give a clear indication of the power inherent within bindu. The bindu must be a focal point of power because it connects all things to their common, underlying source. As we have already pointed out, science is beginning to find out this fact, something that mystics have known since time immemorial.

Bindu and sex

The bindu is often closely related to male sperm. The reason is not difficult to understand: from one drop of sperm, the tiniest bindu combined with the ova of the female grows life in the form of a baby. The bindu point of sperm is the starting point for creation. This is symbolic of the more subtle bindu which makes manifest all objects from the underlying substratum. In fact, it is almost a perfect symbol which makes understanding of the bindu a little easier. Because the bindu is widely associated with male sperm, many tantric charts of the human centres show the bindu in man, but omit it in women. That is, the bindu trigger point is clearly depicted at the back of the male head. This symbolism only applies when bindu is intended to indicate sperm. In actual fact, both men and women have a bindu, a subtle bindu that is, for without bindu they could not exist. In kriya yoga sadhana, both men and women should concentrate on the bindu trigger point at the back of the head.

In other symbolic systems the bindu is comprised of two other bindus, one red and one white. In the *Chudamani Upanishad* it is written: "The bindu is of two types, white and red. The white is *shukla* (sperm) and the red is *maharaja* (menses)." (v. 60)

This white bindu symbolizes Shiva, purusha or consciousness. The red bindu symbolizes Shakti, prakriti, the power of manifestation of all objects. The trigger point for bindu is at the back of the head; this is the centre that is used in kriya yoga. The seat of the red bindu is the mooladhara chakra. The purpose of yoga, tantra and all other spiritual systems is to unite these principles, so that Shiva (male)

and Shakti (female) become one. The text continues: "The red bindu is established in the sun; the white bindu in the moon. Their union is very difficult." (v. 61)

Though difficult, their union is the whole purpose of yoga. Here the sun represents pingala and the moon represents ida¹. These two bindus also symbolize the merging of opposites in terms of male and female. The dynamic prana (female) merges with the static consciousness (male). The result of this union is the seed of the bindu from which manifestation begins, including life. In all spiritual practices, this union results in the ascent of the kundalini: "When the red bindu (Shakti) moves upwards (the ascent of the kundalini) by control of prana, it mixes with the white bindu (Shiva) and one becomes divine." (v. 63)

All systems of yoga control prana in one way or another; sometimes it is direct control as in the case of pranayama, in other cases it is indirect. The meeting and merging of these two polarities, Shakti and Shiva, individual and consciousness, leads to superconsciousness: "He who realizes the essential oneness of the two bindus when the red bindu merges with the white bindu alone knows yoga." (v. 64)

Only he who unites these two polarities can know the real meaning of yoga (union) through experience. In these verses we have only discussed the symbolic meaning of the bindu, but there are many more implications behind the previous verses in the practical use of sexual intercourse as a means to higher consciousness. The verses imply that retention of orgasm, by both male and female, during sexual intercourse – retention of the physical bindu – can lead to absorption in the exquisitely subtle bindu, the trapdoor to the sahasrara. The harmony, concentration and unleashing of psychic forces under controlled conditions of sexual intercourse can lead to transcendental experience. This can arise only, however, when there is a high degree of mental harmony in the practitioners. Those people who do not have the necessary level of mental purity will not reap the benefits of spiritual experience. This method is called *maithuna* in tantra and is prescribed for those aspirants called *virya* (literally: heroic) – those with a reasonable level of attainment in yoga. The average person is called *pashu* (instinctive) which means that they have so much dis-

harmony in the mind that they will not reap the fruit of maithuna. Sexual intercourse is for anyone who is inclined; maithuna, however, in the real sense is not. There has to be prior purification of the mind.

Maithuna is not part of kriya yoga as such, but the purpose of both methods is the same: expansion of awareness and fusion with the shoonya via bindu. In maithuna, the bindu of sexual intercourse is used to heighten sensitivity to the transcendental bindu; in kriya yoga, the trigger point of the bindu at the back of the head is used to bring about the same result.

Bindu, vishuddhi chakra and amrit

When we described vishuddhi chakra we pointed out that nectar or amrit trickles down from bindu to vishuddhi². This amrit is bliss and the bindu is the abode of uninterrupted bliss. This is symbolized in Indian mythology by the river Ganges (nectar) coming from the crescent moon (bindu).

This amrit or divine nectar flows down through the sushumna passage from bindu³. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "The nectar secreted from the bindu is indeed the consort (Shakti) of Shiva (consciousness). It fills the sushumna passage." (v. 4:46)

In kriya yoga, the aim is to awaken the chakras and balance ida and pingala so that bindu will flood the sushumna passage.

Bindu and concentration of mind

Bindu implies dissolution or nullification of mental fluctuations. The mind becomes lucid, receptive and perfectly one-pointed. It becomes crystalline . . . a perfect reflector of pure consciousness.

In the famous *Yoga Sūtras* by Patanjali it says: "To block the patterns of consciousness is yoga." (1:2)

This is a raja yoga text and concentration of mind is brought about by raja yoga techniques. The bindu is not mentioned in the entire scripture, yet they are really talking about the same thing. Perfect concentration of mind implies that there is awareness of bindu. Piercing of the bindu, as in kriya yoga, implies that there is perfect concentration of mind. The bindu also implies total cessation of all mental fluctuations; at this stage the path of yoga is transformed into the experience of yoga.

Some yogic methods bring concentration of mind through manipulation of prana, as in pranayama. The sense behind this approach is explained as follows: "When the breath is irregular, then the mind is also unsteady, but when the breath is controlled then the mind too will be controlled, calm and one-pointed." (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 2:2) Conversely: "Steadiness of mind leads to steadiness of the prana; with this the bindu also becomes steady." (*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* 4:28)

Therefore, control of breath, concentration of mind and bindu are closely related. When the mind is concentrated on the bindu point, then one passes from the limited to the unlimited. One passes beyond the realms of the mind. This is the reason why concentration of mind is the essence of all yoga practices and spiritual life in general. It is by piercing the bindu that one passes into the realm of pure consciousness, into the realms of zero time – the timeless.

Bindu and nada yoga sadhana

According to ancient Indian philosophy, consciousness expresses itself through nada (subtle vibration). Three concepts are worth mentioning: kala, bindu and nada. Kala is the individuating principle mentioned under the heading 'Evolutionary Implications'. Bindu is the point through which consciousness expresses itself in the created universe. Nada is the flow of consciousness from the infinite through the bindu to the object of creation. This process can be compared to a funnel: bindu and kala bring the consciousness into a concentrated flow and nada is the medium through which consciousness flows along the restricted orifice. When the nada moves upwards, then creation takes place. This is denoted by the pravritti marga and is called manifestation or material evolution. Nada is regarded as the link between pure consciousness and all created objects. This nada can also be used to proceed in the opposite direction – the nivritti marga. That is, nada can be used by aspirants as a means of merging their awareness with the source, the sahasrara, pure consciousness. To bring this about, the nada must first of all pass through bindu on the upward path.

Therefore, nada yoga is a means of retracing the path of nada which was the original means

for individual growth and being. With extensive practice, one's perception becomes more and more refined and sensitive. Eventually, one's perception of subtle nada becomes so sensitive that one becomes aware of the bindu. This is the gateway to pure consciousness. This is the essence of nada yoga sadhana⁴.

Symbolism

The bindu is symbolized by both a full moon and a crescent moon. The full moon really represents the infinitesimally small point we have tried to describe in the preceding pages. The crescent moon indicates that the bindu is widely associated with the kalas (phases) of the moon. In the same way that the moon is progressively revealed during the period from new moon to full moon, so the immensity of the sahasrara behind the bindu can be gradually unveiled through all types of yoga practices, if they are done regularly and sincerely, and if one has burning aspiration day and night to understand life and oneself. This crescent moon implies that the spiritual aspirant has some glimpses of sahasrara, behind the bindu, but by no means a total experience. The totality can never be known while there is individuality.

The bindu is drawn on the background of the night sky, indicating that the basis of bindu, the sahasrara, is infinite. Most people who practise yoga are familiar with the symbol of Aum: ॐ. In the top right hand corner of the symbol there is a small point and a crescent moon. The point is called *visarga* (drop) and represents bindu; the crescent moon also represents bindu, as already explained. The chakras exist in the realm of the main figure, together with the qualities of *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattwa*. These exist in the realm of nature – *prakriti*. The bindu is shown separate from the main body of Aum indicating that bindu is transcendental and beyond the fetters of nature.

Bindu trigger point in kriya yoga

For the purpose of kriya yoga practice, the trigger point for the bindu is regarded as being at the back of the head. The two diagrams for kriyas number 1 and 2 (*vipareeta karani mudra* and *chakra anusandhana*) in this lesson show the exact location⁵.

Practice for location of trigger point

No special practices are required to locate this centre. One should merely begin to practise the first two kriya yoga techniques⁵. This in itself will lead to sensitivity of the bindu.

Understanding the bindu

The bindu can only be understood through regular practice of yoga, or any other spiritual system. This discussion has tended to be a little technical. If you are the type of person who is reflective in nature and able to unceasingly enquire into the real nature of things, then we suggest that you enquire into the real nature of bindu. If this is done with sufficient intensity, then this alone can bring about an understanding of bindu.

Notes

¹ For full details refer to Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

² Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4 and Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

⁵ Topic 4 of this lesson

Daily Practice Program

Now it is time to integrate the kriyas of kriya yoga into your daily program. In this lesson we have given the first two kriyas of the sequence, namely vipareeta karani mudra and chakra anusandhana. As these two kriyas do not take much time to do, you should also practise other yogic techniques. Because this lesson has been mainly concerned with introducing kriya yoga, we have not given many practices as such, but you should read the discussions carefully as this will help you to practise kriya yoga correctly.

The following are suggested practice programs of which you should choose one according to time available.

Note that we have omitted the 30 minute program since at least half an hour will soon be needed to practise the first few kriyas. If you only have half an hour to spare every day, then we suggest that you do not start to practise kriya yoga. For general health benefits you should adopt any of the programs outlined in the first 24 lessons.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	20
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	20
Chidakasha Dharana	6
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	7
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	12
Chakra Shuddhi	15
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	10
	90

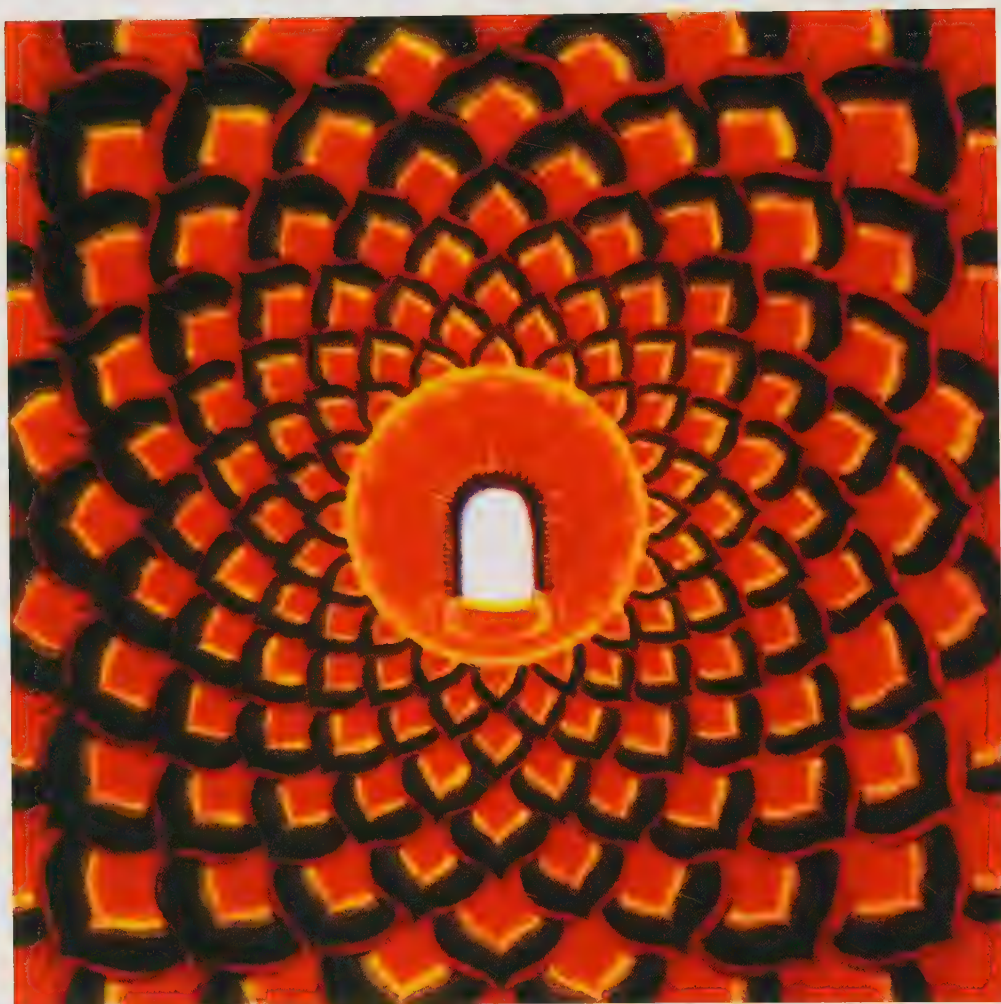
Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Halasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	10
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Ajapa Japa – Stage 5	8
	60

Lesson 26

The human mind is no more than a centre of consciousness. The more centred or one-pointed it becomes, the more powerful, blissful and harmonized it becomes. The greater the one-pointedness, the greater the wisdom and knowledge. On the yogic path, the mind has to become like a bindu – infinitesimally concentrated yet with unlimited potential. Kriya yoga brings about this concentration of mind naturally, without force or excessive effort. The secret lies in the simultaneous harmonization of the physical, psychic and mental energies of the human framework. This process automatically concentrates the mind to a perfect bindu. It is then that things start to happen that are beyond the normal comprehension of man. The blind begin to see for the first time. Kriya yoga converges all the energies, gross and subtle, into a point (bindu) in the middle of the mandala of one's being. This is the gateway to meditation and shooonya.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati



BSY ©

Sahasrara

Sahasrara

The picture we have given of the sahasrara is an attempt to express the inexpressible. It is *shoonya* – the void; perhaps it should be called *shoonya-shoonya* – the voidless void, the void of totality. It is Brahman. It is everything and nothing. Everything we say about it must be wrong, as we would be immediately limiting and categorizing it. Even if we say that it is infinite, we are wrong. It transcends all concepts, yet it is the source of all concepts. It is the merging of consciousness and prana. The sahasrara is the culmination of yoga. In fact, it is yoga itself . . . the perfect merging.

The literal meaning of the word *sahasrara* is 'one thousand'. For this reason, it is said to be a lotus with one thousand petals. However, the word *sahasrara*, while literally meaning one thousand, implies that its magnitude and significance is vast. In fact, unlimited. Therefore, *sahasrara* should more aptly be described as a lotus with an infinite number of petals.

It is both formless (*nirakara*) and with form (*akara*), yet it is also beyond and therefore untouched by form (*nirvikara*). It transcends logic, for logic compares one thing with another. The sahasrara is the totality, so what is there to compare it with?

It is the supreme experience, but even this statement is misleading. Experience implies an individual, separated from the experience, who is experiencing the experience. The sahasrara is beyond experience. It implies that the experience, the experienced and the experiencer are one and the same. The seer, seeing and seen are merged as a unified whole. Even this is a misconception, for they have always been merged. In this situation, who is there to experience? These are only words, but words intended to indicate that sahasrara is beyond all definition . . . beyond description. The picture that we have given is a humble attempt to depict that which cannot be depicted.

Mount Kailash is a famous mountain in the Himalayas. It is said to be the abode of Shiva and Shakti, who live in eternal nuptial bliss. Symbolically, the mountain represents sahasrara, where consciousness and prana (Shiva and Shakti) are unified. Every mystical and religious system throughout the world has its own unique way of symbolizing sahasrara. Experience of sahasrara is called by different names: Buddhists call it nirvana; Hindus call it kaivalya, turiya, nirvikalpa samadhi and so forth; Sufis call it baqa; Christians call it heaven; Kabbalists call it Ain Soph. It is possible to list hundreds of names, all meaning the same thing – sahasrara.

Sahasrara is not a chakra as is often thought. Chakras are within the realms of the psyche. Consciousness manifests at different levels according to the chakra that is predominantly functioning. Sahasrara acts through nothing, and yet again, it acts through everything. It is beyond the beyond (*paratparam*), and yet it is right here. Sahasrara is the culmination of the progressive ascension through the different chakras. It is the crown of expanded awareness.

Many ancient people worshipped the seven (then known) planets. These represent the six principal chakras and sahasrara. The planets were regarded as living in the sun, for the sun is analogous to white light, which contains the essence of all other colours; it is also the source of the other planets. This symbolizes that the power of the chakras does not reside in the chakras themselves, but in sahasrara. The chakras themselves are only switches. All the potential lies in the sahasrara.

If you want more descriptions of sahasrara, we suggest that you read any of the thousands of mystical and religious scriptures. But do not become attached to intellectual analysis. It will lead you nowhere, except into a bog of misconceptions. It is far better to practise yoga, or any other spiritual system, and raise your own level of awareness.

Kriya Yoga (Part 2)

In this second part we will discuss the vitally important topic of awareness. This is the essence of kriya yoga as well as other meditation techniques. The ability to witness all events, whether internal or external with an attitude of detachment is the means to concentration of the mind. Generally, the mind is constantly flooded with a stream of both outside stimuli and inner chattering. There is a continuous 'noise' in the mind. The mind screen, the field of perception, is overwhelmed by this never-ending turmoil, which acts as a veil to deeper exploration of one's inner being. In meditation practices and in everyday life, it is necessary to reduce this chatter. One of the most powerful methods is to adopt the attitude of the witness of all events.

It is emotional association with both inner and outer events that acts as fuel for this mental chatter. It is emotional attachment that supercharges one's thoughts and reactions to thoughts. Acting as a witness cuts the emotional ties, which stops the inner noise and makes the mind peaceful. Under this condition *shanti* (peace) and *dharana* (concentration) can arise in the mind.

Concentration and awareness – a definition

Concentration means to focus one's attention on one point or object to the exclusion of all other things and thoughts. Generally, concentration is associated with suppression of extraneous thoughts.

Awareness is widely used in two different senses:

1. Awareness as a practice of witnessing.
2. Awareness as a spontaneous state of meditation; a state of perfect inner silence combined with heightened wakefulness.

In this text, and in the context of kriya yoga, the meaning of the word awareness will be as in the first definition. That is, awareness will mean the process of witnessing one's acts and thoughts. It means the process of dissociating

oneself from the workings of the mind. The mind is allowed to do its own thing, to carry on its normal functioning without suppression, yet you cease to identify with it. This is awareness and can be applied in one's daily duties as well as in kriya yoga and other meditation techniques.

Unawareness means identification with objects, ideas, etc. This is called thought, when the awareness is ensnared and trapped by the objects of perception, whether inner or outer. This entanglement can be severed so that objects and ideas are separated from one's self-identification. That is, one remains a witness to all mental perceptions and physical actions. This is called awareness.

Awareness, according to our definition, also implies that no forceful attempt is made to concentrate the mind by suppressing thoughts. This is particularly important in kriya yoga¹.

The computer mind

The mind is a machine. It is programmed with countless thoughts; it is full of thoughts of the past and plans for the future. It is plagued and tormented by worries, fears, jealousies, etc. It continually broods over 'whether that man likes me or dislikes me', 'have I made a good impression', 'did I make a fool of myself', 'I was very clever today' and so forth. The mind may remember a pleasant holiday, or angrily remember an argument, etc. There is no end to these mental fluctuations. They can never be stopped or suppressed directly, for they will merely bubble up again with increased intensity. Identification with the mind processes can never lead to mental peace, bliss or self-knowledge.

Then what should one do to find peace in life? The most direct method is by developing awareness. You must try to witness all thoughts and actions as something outside your being. This is the means to break the spell – the hypnotic effect of the continuous stream

of thoughts. Instead of being lost in one's thoughts and actions, one should try to become a witness of them.

In India, the automatic functions of the mind are called karma. It refers to the mental impressions that make up one's personality. These mental impressions oppose or reinforce, believe or disbelieve an endless flow of concepts in the mind. It is these mental impressions which make one feel inferior or superior, good or bad and so forth. These impressions arise in the mind and cause corresponding external action. If one identifies with them, it is easy to get lost on the path of life. Karma is in the mind; it indicates entanglement and attachment with external phenomena and the subconscious data of the mind. To become free from the bondage of karma one must become a witness.

Yet strange to say, there is a strong tendency to hold on to thoughts, especially pleasant thoughts, as one would hold on to the top of a multi-storey building. People are frightened to release their attachment to thoughts and concepts in case they find meaninglessness in life. Yet just the opposite is true. The more one ceases to be attached to thoughts and ideas, the more happiness and meaning one will find.

Awareness in everyday life

Try to develop more awareness in day to day life. Do not stop everyday activities. You should work, for work is a means to slowly tame the tempestuous mind. If you do not work, then you will merely start to brood about your problems, become negative and lethargic. Do your work and duties but also try to be aware. Be watchful, observant of every thought, emotion and action. Let thoughts and emotions arise without judgement and with detachment. If you start to judge or condemn, then you will reinforce the thought patterns of the mind. Do not suppress; be detached. Allow all the emotional impulses, memories, etc., to bubble up from the subconscious. Do not fight them; just allow them to arise without reaction.

Your plan for daily living should be as follows: to act and think, but not to be bound by actions and thoughts. Be detached. Be a witness. This will bring peace into your life and will also help you to make your mind more receptive to kriya yoga practice. Detachment

is an important attribute that you should slowly awaken, as it will increase your ability to maintain awareness in daily life.

To awaken awareness you should also try to practise some of the other forms of yoga, such as karma yoga, bhakti yoga and jnana yoga. At first when you try to be aware you will find great difficulty. You have been conditioned to be lost in the thought processes; as such you will easily and quickly sink into the oblivion of unawareness. Then you will awake again from the haze of thoughts and realize that you lapsed into a state of unconsciousness. Do not worry or become frustrated, for time and practice are necessary.

Awareness in kriya yoga

In meditative practices one can adopt two methods: awareness or concentration. Concentration is widely recommended in traditional texts. However, it is impossible for most people in this busy world, because of turbulent inner disturbances. Serious and forceful attempts to concentrate the mind can cause more harm than good; it can create mental tension, headaches and frustration. If you try to fight the mind you will only lose the battle.

Before concentration of the mind can be achieved, one must first of all exhaust gross inner disturbances, subconscious desires, fears, etc. This is achieved through the practice of awareness. The mind is progressively cleaned and calmed.

Concentration and awareness are both a means to meditation. Awareness, however, is a much smoother, more feasible method for most people. Only those who already have a calm harmonious mind should consider adopting direct concentration as the means to meditation. Awareness is the method of kriya yoga. It unlocks the power of the mind by entering through the back door. It is for this reason that kriya yoga, though being an ancient system, is ideally suited to modern man.

In kriya yoga, you should be aware of the mechanics of the practice: breathing, mantra, body movement, whatever. Be careful not to become seduced by the inner thoughts or by external events. Let perceptions arise in the mind, be aware of them, but also be aware of the practice. Do not try to concentrate; only be a witness of the mind, outside events and the practice in hand. This will allow mental dross

to arise from the subconscious and be removed as a source of disturbance. This process has to occur before concentration can arise. Do not suppress even if your mind is jumping around like a wild monkey. Only be aware and carry on with your practice. Eventually the mind will settle and become peaceful.

The aim of kriya yoga is to induce a state of thoughtlessness, but this state cannot arise by suppression of thoughts. Suppression of thoughts is like pressing down a high spot in an air bed – it merely rises elsewhere.

The thoughtless state of mind allows direct perception. Thoughts act as a veil that prevents exploration of one's being, in the same way that a dirty, dusty window prevents one seeing the bright sun outside. The thoughtless state of mind is like a perfectly clean window, and this state of mind will arise naturally through the practice of kriya yoga.

But do not try to induce thoughtlessness as an aim in kriya yoga, for this in itself will create more thoughts. Merely do your practice, watch the thoughts as they arise. Simply be an observer, without like or dislike but maintain your awareness of the practice.

Suppression of minor thoughts

At a certain stage in your kriya yoga practice you may find that your mind becomes very calm, and only a few minor thoughts arise. At this point there is justification for suppression. This situation may arise after a few months of regular practice, or it may occur during a particularly auspicious practice session. You should definitely not suppress emotionally charged thoughts, but minor ones can be 'squashed'. It is like an elephant and an ant. If an elephant annoys you and disturbs your peace, tact must be used. You have to watch carefully and use cunning to get rid of the elephant. If an ant annoys you, on the other hand, then it can be quickly picked up and removed. It is the same with major and minor thoughts. You must use your discretion here in deciding which thoughts are minor in nature.

Wakefulness and sleepiness

One of the biggest problems in kriya yoga practice is sleepiness. There is a tendency in human nature to easily sink into the state of slumber, especially if there is some mental relaxation, such as will arise during kriya yoga

practice. Many people want this drowsiness, for it is pleasant and allows one to forget the problems of daily life. But you should try to understand that the state of meditation, attained through relaxed wakefulness, is far more pleasant. Furthermore, relaxed wakefulness leads to self-knowledge and bliss, whereas sleep, even ten years of continuous sleep, will never result in self-knowledge. Therefore, the serious practitioner should make all efforts to remain wide awake throughout the practice, no matter how tempted he is to gently slip into a state of sleep and pleasant dreams. It is far better to do kriya yoga with a wandering mind than a sleeping mind, for at least the problems of the mind can be removed if there is wakefulness.

In kriya yoga, you should try to remove the tamasic state by taking a cold bath, doing some asanas and surya namaskara beforehand, and making a resolve that you will not sleep. The rajasic state is absolutely necessary; it is the state where the mind is emptied of thoughts and progressively harmonized; you must try to be aware of the process. This awareness will eventually lead to the sattwic state and meditation.

Pleasant and unpleasant experiences

Be prepared to notice vast ups and downs in your emotions; sometimes you may feel jubilant, other times depressed. This will occur in your daily life and is a necessary process in the purging of mental problems. Kriya yoga will induce it. Try not to worry, just flow with these moods, accept them and be aware. Only if the emotions are excessively explosive and negative (because of deep-rooted problems) should you reduce or even stop your kriya practices for some time. If necessary consult an experienced teacher and guide.

This purging process is the first stage to self-knowledge. If you do not pass through these experiences, often nasty and unpleasant, then it is impossible to explore the deeper realms of your mind. But the process should be reasonably slow otherwise you may experience overwhelming upsets and emotional storms. The accumulated mental neuroses have to be slowly exhausted from the mind over a period of time. This is why we have preceded kriya yoga by a lengthy description of other forms of yoga, and urged you to practise every day.

This preparation is absolutely necessary, for it gently removes gross problems from the mind. Kriya yoga is rather strong medicine; if it is done by someone with excessive problems then it can induce very unpleasant disturbances in one's life. Therefore, we urge people who have not done at least two years of other yoga practices, not to start kriya yoga at this stage. First of all prepare yourself by regular practice of other, gentler forms of yoga.

During actual kriya yoga practice, or during dreams, you may also confront fearsome aspects of the mind. You may see frightening monsters, giant spiders and so many other things. There is almost no limit to the types of apparitions that can erupt from the mind. These are the expressions of the hidden negative aspects of the subconscious mind. Problems that were previously unknown will erupt into conscious perception. This too is a necessary part of the cleaning process of the mind. But you should proceed slowly with your practices; if the confrontation with these gruesome mental explosions is too intense, then you should reduce or stop your practice for some time.

As these subconscious forces arise you should not resist them. Always remember that there is an end to these disturbing influences of the mind. Therefore, try to continue your practices; don't give up. Let them come and be aware. Let them bubble up without suppression. This is important.

Remember: the more you experience and exhaust these negative aspects of the mind the better, for the mind will become progressively calmer and harmonious. Your life will become more harmonious. Also your yoga practices, whether kriya yoga or otherwise, will become more and more effective. In fact, your whole life will transform itself into a state of meditation.

Physical side-effects

The eruption of subconscious forces, the purging process of the mind, may bring health changes. These health changes may be either negative or positive. Again this is a necessary process, since the knots of neurosis are being rooted out in the deeper levels of the subconscious mind. This will automatically induce changes on a physical level. If your health improves, then there is no cause for complaint.

If your health deteriorates, then you can either accept and flow with the situation or seek guidance. Many people who practise kriya yoga in the ashram become physically weak, or have diarrhoea. In the ashram we know it to be part of the mental cleaning process and expect it to happen to some people. We can therefore explain to the people concerned that there is no real cause for alarm. However, when you practise by yourself, you must decide whether to accept changes of health, or to take steps to bring improvement.

Whether your health improves or deteriorates, it is really a move to greater and deeper overall harmony. Health upsets are a temporary phenomena and as you harmonize the mind you will become stronger and any physical ailments will gradually reduce. These ups and downs in health point in a positive direction. If, however, the downs are too drastic, then you should stop your practices. Certainly you should not practise during illness.

Increase in desire

Kriya yoga practice may induce strong, overwhelming desires for many things, such as sweets, rich food, etc. This increase in desire means that previously unexpressed and possibly suppressed desires are manifesting. Let them arise; express them externally if need be, if possible without hurting others. Try to be aware. This process is also part of the cleansing of the mind.

Lack of time

If your social commitments do not allow you enough time to practise every day, then do not start to practise kriya yoga. You should only undertake to do kriya yoga sadhana if you can assign sufficient time to practise every morning. At first only half an hour will be necessary, but as you increase the number of kriyas you will be required to practise for a longer period. The full program of kriyas can take about two and a half hours to complete. If you practise about half of them, then about an hour and three quarters to two hours will be needed. So time is necessary. If you only have ten minutes or half an hour to spare every morning, then we suggest that you do not begin kriya yoga at this stage; rather make plans to practise it in the future. This is important. Kriya yoga is a means to self-

knowledge; it is not a plaything to be done lightly. It should be treated with respect. If you practise for three hours one day, then miss for five days, then again do one hour's practice, you will gain little benefit, and because you gain no benefit you will probably lose respect for the practice. Yet if you practise regularly for a reasonable duration, then you will find wonderful changes in your life.

Other paths of yoga

Try to practise other types of yoga such as bhakti², karma³ and jnana yoga⁴, as this will help you to gain the most out of kriya yoga practices. These forms of yoga can be integrated into your daily life, and as such need no structured program.

Drop all concepts

To gain the most benefits from the practice of kriya yoga it is essential to try to drop all concepts, ideas and beliefs. This actually applies to all yoga practices, for all conditioning dulls clarity and perception. All attachment to traditions, to other people's ideas, have to be dropped. These act as a mighty barrier, like a thick brick wall, between conscious perception of the subtler aspects of your being.

Let us take an analogy. Compare the mind to a pot of water. The water is murky and dirty with small particles. These particles represent all the concepts and conditioned reflexes that you have picked up during life. There are so many particles that it is impossible to see through the water. The water acts as a screen to your vision. The average mind is in the same state; it is so full of preconceptions and ideas that it lacks lucidity. Instead of being a perfect reflector of experience, it veils experience. One sees a shadow of experience instead of the experience itself. If the water is continually stirred, then the water always remains murky; the particles do not settle and prevent the water assuming its natural transparent state. It is the same with the average mind: it is continually being filled with new concepts and theories. The mind is kept in a state of agitation. If the concepts were dropped then the mind would become as clear as a crystal. In this state, one's perception could illuminate the deeper realms of one's being.

It is not easy to drop all concepts; it takes time, just as murky water requires time for

the dirty particles to gravitate to the bottom. But we suggest that you at least consider the possibility of trying to drop all concepts based on second hand experience. Regular practice of yoga, and especially kriya yoga, will help you to do this. The process will be hastened. But at least make a conscious effort.

Ramana Maharshi was asked many times what one must do to know truth. His reply was emphatic: "Forget every concept that you have." Intellectual suppositions and fantasies merely fill the mind with dust. Throw them out, or at least do not take them seriously. Intellectual knowledge has its place in the scheme of life, but do not be bound by it. It is certainly based upon imagination and delusion. Every sincere seeker of wisdom must endeavour to free his mind from all attachment to intellectual opinions.

It was with good reason that Tilopa, the great yogi, told his disciple Naropa: "Look into the mirror of the mind." There is significance in his words, and by a mirror he did not mean a dirty or cracked mirror; he meant a mirror that was a perfect reflector of reality. Your mind must be slowly polished so that all concepts and conditioning are wiped away.

We assume that you are a sincere seeker of wisdom. If you were not, then you would not have started to practise kriya yoga. Therefore, we suggest that you make a resolve to detach yourself from all intellectual speculations. Use the intellect but do not be bound by it. In this way you will allow the kriya practices to manifest their fullest potential.

Aspiration and patience

A person can never raise his level of wisdom without aspiration. Every yogi, sage, seer, saint had this overwhelming need and aspiration to know. Only when there is this strong need to transcend normally accepted limitation, can one begin to tread the path to wisdom. This aspiration is also necessary in kriya yoga practice. Without it, you will give up after a few weeks and become distracted by other things. There must be aspiration, for this is the driving force that will make you continue to practise kriya yoga through thick and thin. It is aspiration that will give you the strength to face the dross that will initially emerge from your mind. If you have this mighty aspiration, then we urge you to start kriya yoga.

The culmination of kriya yoga

Kriya yoga is in itself a means. It is designed to illuminate and flood the understanding of the practitioner so that you remove all misconceptions, clean the mind and re-identify yourself with the deeper nature. This re-identification can only come through overwhelming personal experience. This is sometimes called *anugraha* (grace). It can arise through kriya yoga. Once one has confronted one's *swabhava* (real nature) then kriya yoga has served its purpose. One will henceforth fix one's mind automatically on Shiva consciousness. One will spontaneously identify oneself with one's real nature, through bad and good circumstances of life. One's whole life becomes full with this re-identification. One's life becomes a source and generator of bliss and wisdom. Kriya yoga is a step on this path.

Notes

¹ For a fuller explanation of awareness refer to: Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 1; Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5

² Bhakti Yoga: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Part 3 – Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1; Part 4 – Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1

³ Karma Yoga: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1

⁴ Jnana Yoga: Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 3: NADA SANCHALANA (ROTATION OF SOUND CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *nada* means 'flow'; in the context of this practice it means 'flow of consciousness in the form of the sound Aum'. The Sanskrit word *sanchalana* means 'rotation' or 'conduction'. The English translation is therefore 'the rotation (or conduction) of sound consciousness'.

Rationale

This kriya is the first of a group of three kriyas – nada sanchalana, pawan sanchalana and shabda sanchalana – which follow each other in succession. They progressively induce sensitivity to the psychic pathways through the chakras. Nada sanchalana prepares one for the subsequent kriyas. It removes blockages in the flow of prana through the arohan and the awarehan. From this kriya onwards there should be a gradual increase in subtle perception and one-pointedness of mind.

Unmani Mudra

This kriya and the following four kriyas use a very simple mudra called *unmani mudra*. The word *unmani* literally means 'no mind', 'no thinking'. Therefore, unmani mudra can be called 'the attitude of thoughtlessness' or 'the attitude of meditation'.

Physically, the mudra is very easy to perform. In kriya yoga it is done as follows:
Eyes open wide, but without strain.
Awareness at the bindu.

As your awareness descends through the chakras – ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana to mooladhara – the eyes should slowly close.

Though the eyes remain open, your attention should be on the chakras and the descending awarehan psychic passage . . . your eyes are open, but you should be looking inside.

The eyes can be completely closed or slightly open when your awareness reaches mooladhara chakra. Choose that which you like best through experience. When you do this mudra do not try too hard; let it happen.

The practice is done more mentally than physically; that is, though the eyelids are slowly closed, the important thing is to feel the process mentally. Though the eyes are open they should not perceive anything outside. This is unmani mudra.

The state of unmani arises during meditation. Though one may be acting in the world there is a state of thoughtlessness. This is called *unmani avastha* (the state of no thought). The mind functions but without the hindrance of conflicting thoughts and analysis. One is conscious and the mind functions, but it seems to be nowhere. In this state, the eyes perceive, but one does not see. This is unmani.

The state of unmani is widely mentioned in the traditional yogic-tantric scriptures. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states: "Without support for the mind, one should become thoughtless; then one will remain like a space which is both inside and outside a jar." (v. 4:50) This is the state of meditation – unmani.

"Whatever there is in the world, animate and inanimate, is only the scenery of the mind. When the mind achieves a state of unmani, then ignorance and duality cease." (v. 4:61) Unmani implies that state which is beyond thought – meditation. It is a state where all attachment to the world of objects is dispelled. The aim of kriya yoga is to bring about unmani. Unmani mudra is a simple technique that helps to induce the experience.

Psychic passage rotation

In nada sanchalana you will be required to move your awareness through the arohan and awarehan psychic passages. Arohan is the ascending frontal passage and awarehan the descending passage¹.

As you rotate your awareness through these psychic pathways try to feel that each chakra and kshetram is being pierced in turn by a powerful flow of prana. If you wish you can imagine that each of the centres is like a bead and that together they form a chakra-kshetram mala. Imagine that each bead is being pierced and threaded by a sharp needle of prana. This penetration should be more of a feeling than a thought. Try not to bring in intellectual speculation.

Mental repetition

When your awareness reaches bindu at the top of the arohan you should mentally say the word 'bindu' three times.

On reaching mooladhara at the bottom of the avarohan passage you should mentally repeat 'mooladhara' three times.

As your awareness passes through each of the other centres mentally say its name once.

Chanting of Aum

You should chant the mantra Aum as your awareness descends through the avarohan passage. The sound must be loud and explosive as it starts from bindu. Then as your awareness moves through the chakras in the spine the sound should become a humming sound. Try to feel the sound piercing the chakras in turn. In fact, you should identify the sound with the flow of prana. The sound should end when your awareness reaches the mooladhara chakra.

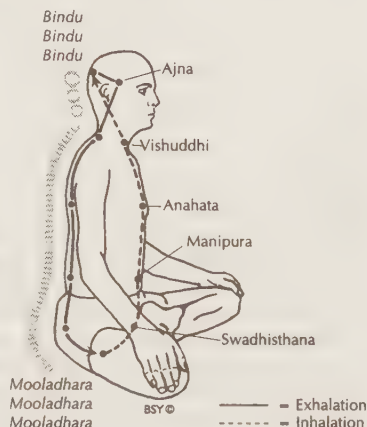
We can summarize the process as follows: bindu to ajna – explosive sound; ajna to mooladhara – a humming sound concentrated in the spine.

The sound of Aum should be loud and penetrating; in this way it has the greatest power to sensitize the chakras. However, it is not always possible to make a lot of noise, especially if it is early in the morning, as you may disturb other people living in your house. Under these circumstances you can chant Aum as a loud whisper.

Body position

Preferably sit in padmasana or siddhasana (siddha yoni asana for women)². These are the two sitting poses that have been taught by tradition. However, if you cannot sit in any of these asanas choose any other comfortable

sitting position such as vajrasana, ardha padmasana, etc.² You should remain in the same sitting position that you used for kriya number 2.



Technique

After completing kriya number 2, chakra anusandhana, you should proceed directly to nada sanchalana.

Do not change your sitting position.

Open the eyes. Hold the spine upright.

Exhale deeply.

Bend your head forwards; do not press the chin against the chest or make the neck stiff.

The position of the head should be such that it is slumped forwards as though you are sleeping in a sitting position.

Fix your awareness at mooladhara chakra.

Repeat mentally: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara' with concentration, absolute stillness of the body and while holding the breath.

Inhale up the frontal arohan passage doing ujjayi pranayama³.

As your awareness ascends through the kshetrams, mentally say their name once: 'swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi'.

Try to feel that each centre is being pierced by prana as your awareness passes through it. As your awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu slowly raise your head.

When your awareness reaches bindu your head should be upright and facing forwards.

Hold your breath for a short time.

With awareness fixed at bindu mentally repeat: 'bindu – bindu – bindu'. Remember: there should be complete concentration, stillness of

the body and no movement of the head while repeating 'bindu'.

Then exhale with an explosive Aum sound. You should feel as though there is a terrific build-up of pressure at bindu and that the result is an explosion of Aum .

The Aum should be chanted as your awareness passes down the avarohan passage in the spine from bindu to mooladhara.

The 'AU' sound of Aum should suddenly explode as your awareness passes from bindu to ajna.

The 'M-M-M-M' sound should travel from ajna to mooladhara, becoming progressively more subtle so that by the time your awareness reaches mooladhara it is a slight buzzing sound. Practise unmani as your awareness descends. Mentally say the name of each centre as your awareness passes through them in turn: 'ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana'. When you reach mooladhara gently lean your head forwards.

Open your eyes.

This is the end of the first round.

The process is summarized picture on the previous page.

After completing the first round start the second immediately.

Repeat the word: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Then with ujjayi pranayama start to ascend through the frontal arohan psychic passage.

Do 13 rounds.

Then proceed directly to kriya number 4⁴.

Breathing

There should be a short breath retention while repeating mooladhara three times mentally. Ujjayi inhalation should be synchronized with the ascent of awareness through the arohan passage. Retain the breath for a short time while mentally repeating bindu three times. Exhale with Aum sound from bindu to mooladhara through the spinal avarohan psychic passage.

Awareness

Try to practise the kriya in the correct manner with alertness. It is very easy to forget parts of the practice or even do the practice without attention. Let the thoughts arise, but try to maintain awareness of the practice. If you feel sleepy take a cold wash or bath.

Remember to try to remain a witness throughout the practice.

Counting of rounds

You have to do 13 rounds. Therefore, at the end of each round you have to keep a count of the number of rounds that have been done. You should count as your awareness reaches mooladhara at the end of Aum descent in the avarohan passage. Various methods of counting can be used. Mental counting is the obvious method, but this has the drawback that it is very easy to forget. If you wish you can count on your fingers. The best method, however, is to use a mala. You should tie a knot or piece of string at the thirteenth bead past the sumeru (junction or summit) bead⁵. When you start the practice of nada sanchalana, hold the mala just before the first bead after the sumeru bead. Then as you complete each round, rotate the mala through one bead. When you reach the thirteenth bead you will feel the knot and know that you have completed 13 rounds. Experiment and find the method of counting that you like the best.

About 7 or 8 minutes will be required to complete 13 rounds.

Notes

¹ We have given full details of these two psychic passages in Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁴ Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 2

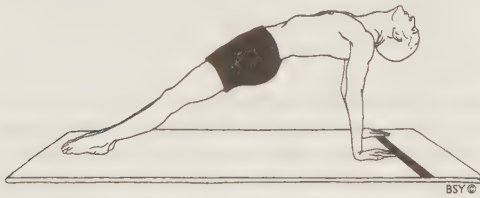
⁵ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

Asanas: Practice

In this topic we will discuss two backward bending asanas – setu asana and chakrasana. These two asanas give similar benefits; therefore it is not necessary to do both of them. Those who are able should practise the more difficult chakrasana; those who cannot do chakrasana can practise setu asana instead.

SETU ASANA (BRIDGE POSE)

The Sanskrit word *setu* means 'bridge'. Therefore, in English this asana can be called 'bridge pose'.



Technique

Sit on the floor with your legs stretched forwards. Place the palms of your hands on the floor to the side and behind the buttocks. This is the starting position.

Your arms should be straight with the fingers pointing backwards; the trunk should be inclined backwards.

Inhale deeply.

Raise your buttocks as high as is comfortable. Let your head hang backwards and downwards between the two arms.

Hold the breath.

This is the final pose.

Try to place the soles of the feet fully on the ground.

Keep the legs and arms straight.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable duration; then return to the starting position.

Repeat a number of times according to available time.

Breathing

Inhale deeply while in the starting position. Hold the breath while raising, maintaining the final pose and lowering the body. Exhale on returning to the starting position.

Other details

Further details such as benefits, awareness and so forth are as given for chakrasana.

CHAKRASANA (WHEEL POSE)

The word *chakra* has many meanings: 'wheel', 'circle', 'vortex', 'whirlpool', 'spiral' and so on. In the context of chakrasana, the best English translation is 'wheel pose'. This asana is so called because of the wheel shape taken by the body in the final pose. At first you may think that this is not a very exact description of the asana, especially if you refer to the following picture. However, there are many people with supple spines who can easily grasp their ankles with their hands in the final position. When the asana is done in this manner, then the full circle is achieved, thus fully justifying the traditional name of the asana. However, we do not suggest that you attempt to perform the full circle unless you have a very flexible back. If you do so prematurely, you may snap a few bones and muscles and remain in a permanent backward bend.

Technique

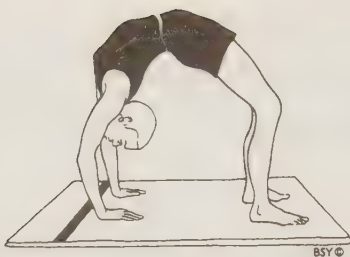
Lie flat on your back.

Bend the legs and place the heels near the buttocks; the feet should be about half a metre apart.

Bend the arms and place the hands on the ground beside the back of the head; the fingers should point towards the shoulders with the palms flat on the floor.

This is the starting position.

Relax the whole body for a few seconds in preparation for performing the final pose.



Breathe in deeply.

Then raise the head and trunk off the ground by straightening the legs and arms; the feet and hands should not be moved.

Try to arch the back as much as possible to take the final pose.

Let the head hang between the two straight arms.

The degree of bend in the back can be accentuated by bending or straightening the knees, and allowing the shoulders to move over the arms.

Do not try to bend the back more than its flexibility will allow.

This is the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply. Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then slowly return to the starting position by slowly lowering the body to the ground.

The asana can be repeated once or twice if you have sufficient energy and time.

Breathing

Inhale deeply in the starting position. Hold the breath while elevating the body to the final pose. Breathe as deeply and slowly as possible in the final pose. Breathe in before lowering the body. Hold the breath while lowering the body to the starting pose.

Use of mat

We suggest that you practise chakrasana on a bare floor, for a mat or blanket can slip and cause injury.

Advice for beginners

If your back is very stiff then we strongly advise you not to attempt to perform chakrasana. Instead, you should systematically loosen up your spine over a period of time by doing other backward bending asanas such as dhanurasana¹, ushtrasana² and so forth. You can also practise setu asana.

At first it is a little difficult to raise the body directly from the ground to the final pose. We therefore suggest that you adopt an intermediate stage; from the starting position raise your body so that you can bend your head backwards. Then rest the top of the head on the ground and support the weight of the body temporarily on the head. From this intermediate position, it is much easier to attain the final pose.

Advice for adepts

If you can comfortably and easily do chakrasana in the way we have described, then you can accentuate the flexion of the back in the final pose by progressively and carefully moving the hands and feet closer towards each other. Be careful not to strain.

Awareness

Direct your attention to relaxing the spine in the final pose. When you can easily perform chakrasana, then direct your attention to slow and deep breathing in the final pose.

Duration

At first you will only be able to stay in the final pose for a few seconds. With practice you can extend the duration in the final pose to up to two minutes. Be sure not to strain.

If you have sufficient time you can perform chakrasana two or three times. But do not attempt it if you feel even slightly tired.

Sequence

Chakrasana is an excellent counterpose for all forward bending asanas. It is particularly useful as a counterpose to asanas such as halasana and sarvangasana which apply a tight forward lock on the neck. Chakrasana stretches the neck in the opposite direction and quickly releases tension. If possible, try to do a forward bending asana after chakrasana.

Limitations

Chakrasana should not be practised by people who suffer from high blood pressure, heart problems, stomach ulcers, dilated eye pupils or hernia, or by anyone who has weak arms. Also, it should not be attempted by anyone who has recently undergone any abdominal operation or who has fractured any bones. Pregnant women should not do it.

Benefits

In a way chakrasana is an inverted form of dhanurasana (the bow pose). As such the benefits are very similar; therefore, to save repetition we suggest that you refer to the benefits given for dhanurasana¹.

There are, however, notable differences in the physical influence of the asanas. In the final pose of dhanurasana the whole weight of the body is supported on the belly.

This firmly and deeply massages the internal organs. Chakrasana also massages the abdominal organs but by stretching the outer muscles; deep breathing in the final pose, accentuates this process.

Chakrasana, unlike dhanurasana, is also an inverted asana. Therefore, a minute or so in the final pose will flush the brain with a freshly oxygenated supply of blood. This will help to improve the efficiency of the brain cells and in turn, the overall health of the entire body. Chakrasana gives an accentuated stretch to all the nerves of the back, including the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerves. The profound backward bend realigns any spinal discs and vertebrae that may be slightly displaced. This action is even greater than that given by dhanurasana.

In summary we can say that chakrasana is an excellent asana that can help to bring about optimum health of the body if it is done regularly. We suggest that you try to master it.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 1)

When the mind is silent and peaceful it becomes very powerful. It becomes the receptor of bliss and wisdom, a perfect instrument. Life becomes a spontaneous flow and expression of joy. All this arises naturally when the mind is in a state of inner silence. However, this inner silence can never arise when there is a continual stream of disturbing thoughts and turbulent emotions. All the inner noise of thoughts and emotions has to be removed before one can experience the soundless sound of inner silence. The practice we will now introduce and describe further in the next four lessons – *antar mouna* – is designed specifically to eradicate mental noise and induce calmness in the mind¹.

Definition

The word *antar* means 'inner' and *mouna* means 'silence'. Therefore, the exact translation of *antar mouna* is 'inner silence'. *Antar mouna* is a meditative technique that leads to inner tranquillity and silence.

Utility

Antar mouna is a basic practice of yoga. It is a fundamental part of Buddhist practice, though it is known by a different name (*vipassana*) and is used in a slightly modified form. Some of the principles of *antar mouna* are also widely used in modern psychiatry. It is one of the most direct methods of tackling the problems of the mind. This is the reason why it is so widely used in both religious, mystical and psychiatric systems.

The by-product of modern life is overwhelming mental tension that almost grinds man into the ground to the point of despair. If these mental tensions are released, even slightly, then life begins to show new promise and new meaning begins to awaken. One method, a very direct method, of releasing these oppressive mental tensions is *antar mouna*.

Everyone has mental suppressions. Since a young age we have habitually suppressed nasty thoughts and desires and tried to forget bad experiences. But suppression does not solve the problem, for the thoughts merely stay submerged in the subconscious realms of the mind in seed form. Even if we are not conscious of them, these suppressed thoughts act furtively from the subconscious to bring pain, unhappiness and frustration in life. To find happiness, real happiness, these mental impressions (*samskaras*) have to be rooted out. A direct method is *antar mouna*.

Antar mouna is very systematic. Firstly, it increases one's resistance to external disturbances. Then it allows subconscious thoughts and pent-up emotions to slowly bubble up to conscious perception. One directly confronts the contents of the subconscious mind: long forgotten memories, fears, hatreds and so forth. Thoughts and feelings that have been hidden for years come to the surface and are exhausted. Gradually the mind is harmonized over a period of time. The mind becomes progressively tranquil and one-pointed.

Eventually a stage is reached where thoughts and emotions from the subconscious tend to be almost insignificant. These are merely the remnants, the most overpowering thoughts and emotions having previously been exhausted. These minor thoughts cause little harm and are more a nuisance than anything else. At this stage the thought processes of the mind can be suppressed to induce a state of thoughtlessness. This can eventually lead to the state of meditation and perception of one's being. This perception, more than anything else in life, will transform one's understanding of existence and one's place in the universe.

Antar mouna is to be used by those people who have disturbances in the mind. It will gradually harmonize the mind so that it eventually attains a state of thoughtlessness and meditation.

Pratyahara

The Sanskrit word *pratyahara* is made up of two root words: *prati* and *ahara*. These root words have the following meanings: *prati* – ‘opposite’, ‘in opposition to’; *ahara* – ‘to fetch’, ‘bring back’, also ‘to take food’. Therefore, the literal meaning of *pratyahara* is ‘to oppose the bringing back’ or ‘to oppose the taking of food’. In yoga, the word has a specific meaning in conjunction with sense perception. It means that sense perception is opposed. We are continuously receiving impressions and data from the external world through the medium of the senses: eyes, ears, etc. These impressions are the food of the mind. They keep the mind in a continual state of agitation and extroversion. *Pratyahara* implies that this bringing back of sense data is opposed. The taking of ‘food’ for the senses is prevented. *Pratyahara* means that inner perception is cut off, disconnected from the senses. This is usually called ‘sense withdrawal’.

In most of our waking life, perception is directed towards the outside world via the senses. By inducing *pratyahara* and preventing external perception, our perception remains inside the mind. This allows perception of the different layers of the mind. This cutting off of external perception is the purpose of the first stage of *antar mouna*.

It is worthwhile pointing out that we perceive the subconscious layers of the mind during dreams. This is similar to the state to be attained in stage 2 of *antar mouna*. However, there is one big difference: in dreams and sleep, the level of awareness is slight or nil; in *antar mouna* and other meditative practices the aim is to maintain a high level of awareness. This is the difference. Actually dreams are themselves the means for releasing tensions from the mind. They act as the safety valve for the mind. Without dreaming, the average person would explode with the pressure of mental tensions. However, this process of confronting mental tension is heightened when there is awareness. Dreams generally lack awareness. Therefore, *antar mouna*, especially stage 2, is essentially a process of ‘conscious dreaming’. This leads to a speeded-up process of removing tensions from the mind.

Pratyahara does not only mean cutting off external sense perception; in fact, this is only the first stage. *Pratyahara* in the real sense of

the word means the state where one’s perception is completely cut off from the thought processes. So, perfected *pratyahara* implies that both external sense perception and the thought processes are transcended. When this state is achieved then *dharana* (concentration) will arise and eventually the state of *dhyana* (meditation).

The entire process of *antar mouna* is concerned with inducing *pratyahara* as a means to meditation. Without *pratyahara*, meditation is impossible, and *pratyahara* itself is not easy. This is why so few people actually experience the higher state of meditation, but if one approaches one’s mind systematically, then meditation will arise. If the approach is incorrect then meditation is unlikely to occur even if you practise twenty-four hours a day for twenty years. *Antar mouna* is one such systematic method.

So remember the order carefully: firstly *pratyahara*, then *dharana* and then *dhyana*. If you follow the stages of *antar mouna* in the correct sequence and perfect each stage, then you will automatically tread the right path.

The six stages

Antar mouna consists of six separate stages. These are briefly as follows:

Stage 1: awareness of sense perceptions

In this stage, one becomes aware of external events. One intentionally directs perception to the outer world. Generally the eyes are closed so that sense impressions will be received mainly through the ears in the form of sound. One can also be aware of the senses of touch and smell. The purpose of this stage is to reduce the influence of outside impressions on one’s perception. It is a case of ‘familiarity breeding contempt’. Intentional perception of the outside world leads automatically to disinterest. The mind ceases to be interested or disturbed by external sounds, etc. This leads automatically to stage 2.

Stage 1 induces the first part of *pratyahara*; that is disassociation of the senses from the outside world.

Stage 2: awareness of spontaneous thought process

In this stage one becomes aware of the spontaneous *samskaras* exploding from the

subconscious realms of the mind. This is the stage where the grosser neuroses, phobias and tensions of the mind are released. You will relive many past experiences and experience the eruption of suppressed desires. There should be absolutely no suppression.

This stage should be practised until the mind becomes reasonably calm and trouble free. Then one should proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: conscious creation of thoughts

In this stage one has to create a thought or visualize a scene at will. After dwelling on the thought for some time it is consciously rejected as an object of perception. Then another thought is posed and again rejected after some time. This is repeated with numerous thoughts of any theme. This is a further process of purging the mind of negative data. These created thoughts stir up associated feelings and ideas that are eventually exhausted. For example, if you create the thought: "I wish I could kill Mr. X," and dwell on this thought then many strong emotions and associated thoughts are drawn up from the subconscious realms of the mind. Many suppressed thoughts and feelings can be exhausted in this manner.

After a few weeks or months of practice one should proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: awareness and disposal of spontaneous thoughts

In this stage one again becomes aware of the spontaneous eruption of thoughts, as in stage 2. However, one should choose prominent thoughts that arise and reflect on them for a short time. Then they should be exhausted at will. Again one should be aware of the spontaneous thought process and again choose a prominent thought. If one has already practised the previous stages 1-3 to a reasonable degree of perfection then the thoughts that arise in this stage will tend to be more subtle. They may even be precognitive or telepathic thoughts. However, these thoughts, no matter how subtle, are still a source of agitation in the mind. Therefore, they too must be exhausted. After some weeks or months one should leave stage 4 and proceed to stage 5.

Stage 5: thoughtlessness

At this stage the mind should be reasonably calm and peaceful. Thoughts will still arise,

but they will not be very strong or cause any great emotional upheaval. At this stage, it is therefore justified to suppress all thoughts completely. This should lead to a state of thoughtlessness. Perfection of this stage implies the attainment of pratyahara. This is the gateway to dharana.

At this stage one should adopt a psychic symbol as a focal point for concentration. Without this symbol one will become lost in the bottomless psychic realms of one's being, and will not reach the destination . . . dhyana.

Sequence

Each stage is a preparation for the following stage. Therefore, it is important to spend some weeks and months perfecting each stage before proceeding to the next. Premature attempts to practise the later stages 3, 4 and 5 without mastering the earlier stages will tend to be a waste of time.

Duration

As a rough guide we suggest that you spend at least one month practising each stage, preferably more. Over the next few lessons we will progressively introduce and describe each stage of antar mouna in turn¹. Therefore, follow the instructions carefully and spend an adequate amount of time on each stage, developing it fully before proceeding to the next stage. One month, however, is the minimum time. If possible, try to spend more time doing each stage, especially stages 2, 3 and 4.

Place and time of practice

Antar mouna, especially the earlier stages, can be practised at any time and any place. It can be practised while walking, sitting, eating, dreaming or in any activity. It can be practised under all conditions – at home, in the office, in a car, among friends – anywhere and everywhere. The practice should not interfere with your work, but if you have a rest or a spare moment try to practise stage 1 or 2. That is, if you are surrounded by noises, try to dissociate yourself from the cause and source. Try to cut yourself off from external stimuli. This is a good method of calming the mind even in the midst of intense noise and the most unpleasant surroundings. Also, if your mind is besieged and disturbed by guilt, worry, fears, etc., try to

practise stage 2. That is, let all thoughts bubble to the surface without suppression. Accept the thoughts and let them evaporate like a cloud. This too will help to reduce the tension level in the mind in day to day life.

If you want to do antar mouna as part of your daily practice program, we suggest that you either practise late at night just before sleep, or early in the morning after waking up. At night, the mind is most likely to be disturbed by the affairs of the day. Possibly the thoughts are so strong that you cannot sleep. Antar mouna should be practised in order to remove these anxieties and calm the restless mind. After some time you will get a good night's sleep.

In the early morning, thoughts are likely to be much less compelling, the grosser thoughts having been partially expressed and diminished through dreams. The thoughts that arise in the mind are likely to be more subtle. Therefore, this is the best time to exhaust deeper thoughts in the subconscious realms of the mind. Negative thoughts of this type are likely to have a profound influence on one's being; removal of them will bring about vast positive changes in one's life.

Noises and other disturbances are likely to be least early in the morning and late at night; therefore it is much easier to ignore sense impressions. Stage 1 of antar mouna is much easier and one can start the serious business of cleaning out the mind in the way described in stage 2¹.

Body position

Antar mouna can be practised in any position. However, we recommend that you sit in any of the traditional meditative asanas, such as padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, sukhasana, vajrasana, etc.²

Awareness

The essence of antar mouna is awareness. In all stages you must try to adopt the attitude of *sakshi bhava* (witnessing). You must try to be the seer, not the thinker. This doesn't mean that you should be absent-minded. On the contrary you should be intensely alert to all occurrences within the mind. But you should try not to become involved with any experiences, whether external sense impressions or inner, bubbling thoughts. Remain a detached observer. Only in this manner can the suppres-

sed thoughts arise from the subconscious mind without impediment and be exhausted.

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 1 AWARENESS OF SENSE PERCEPTION

This is the preliminary stage of antar mouna in which you have to become aware of sensations and experiences in the external world. Most of our sense perceptions come through the eyes. However, in antar mouna the eyes are closed, so that the perceptions which arise during the practice will be sounds, smells, etc. The most compelling of these sense perceptions will be sound. Therefore, stage 1 is primarily concerned with perceiving external sounds.

Purpose

The purpose of antar mouna stage 1 is to eventually induce a state of introversion in preparation for stage 2. Most people have been conditioned since birth to remain extroverted; there is almost an addiction to outside stimuli. Until one becomes introverted it is impossible to start exhausting negative subconscious data from the mind.

The practice is designed to neutralize responses to external phenomena; to become detached and unaffected by the outer world, even if only for a short period of time. This introversion is essential for meditative practice. Many people know this and they try to force themselves to be introverted. They fight their mind and force it to ignore sense impressions. This merely builds up tension and prevents meditation. Therefore, the first stage of antar mouna does not try to suppress the inclination to perceive outer sense data. In fact the method of this stage prescribes intentional awareness of the outer world. Perceive outer impressions. Let them arise. In time you will automatically become introverted. You will spontaneously lose interest in the outside world and when this happens, you are ready to begin stage 2¹.

The mechanics of external perception

For the sake of explanation we can say that there are three main factors involved in external sense perception. These are:

1. The sense organ – transmitter of perception
2. The object of perception
3. Consciousness – the inner perceiver.

These three factors are involved in all sense perceptions whether hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting or touching. Consider the act of hearing for example.

The sense organ that receives sound vibration is the ear. The source of a sound is an external object, perhaps a car horn. The third factor is that which perceives sound – the inner consciousness. Without this inner consciousness nothing can be perceived. Furthermore, from the point of view of consciousness, both the ear and the source of the sound are external. This also applies to smell and the nose, form and the eyes, taste and the tongue and touch and the skin. They are all external to the inner consciousness. This consciousness is the *drashta* (seer) in the innermost depths and centre of your being. When this consciousness can be separated and dissociated from the external sense organs and objects, then one can begin to explore the subconscious mind. This is the aim of stage 1.

Technique

Sit in a steady and comfortable pose.

Keep the spine erect, but without strain.

Close your eyes and keep them closed for the whole practice.

Say to yourself: 'Now I will start the practice of antar mouna.'

First of all be aware of your body.

Feel the sensations of touch – the pressure of your body against the ground, the sensation of the blanket wrapped around your shoulders and so forth.

Fix your whole attention on the sense of touch. Do it intensely until you lose interest.

Then become aware of the outside environment.

Become aware of all sense experiences whether they disturb or not.

Let perception of external stimuli arise without the slightest resistance.

Do not control the mind, only be alert to the outer world.

Keep yourself receptive to everything that is taking place in the surroundings.

Do not make excessive effort for this will create mental tension; let there be choiceless awareness.

Though there are various sense impressions, sound will be the most prominent.

Be aware of outer sounds.

The sound may be a car, telephone, bell, radio, birds, people talking . . . whatever, listen carefully with detached awareness.

Listen to these sounds without judgement, thinking or analysis; only hear the sounds without concern for their cause.

If you hear a bell in an adjoining room, do not think of the bell . . . only listen to the sound.

But you should remain aware, a spectator; do not identify with any of the sounds.

Say to yourself: 'I am the seer, unaffected by these sounds'.

Always consider that the external perceptions are a relation between the objects and the senses; they don't affect you . . . the seer inside. At first you should be aware of all sounds in the environment without choice . . . do not choose, only receive.

Continue this for a few minutes.

Then you should choose a prominent sound and fix your attention on it to the exclusion of all other sounds. Then after a short time, perhaps a minute, switch your attention to another sound of your choice.

Remain alert.

Be aware.

Do not sleep.

Be aware of different sounds in turn.

Then again be aware of all sounds that arise at the same time.

Expand your perception of the external world to the full, stretch your perception to the limits; hear even the slightest sound.

Try not to think . . . only awareness of external sense experiences.

Then become aware of your breath.

Fix your whole attention on the flow of the breath in your nostrils; cut off perception of outside sounds.

Continue breath awareness for a few minutes.

Then again direct your attention to the outside world; again become aware of external sounds.

As before, you can fix your attention on the general noise in the surroundings or choose one prominent sound.

Be alert, do not introvert and become lost in thoughts.

Listen to a ticking clock.

Listen to someone coughing.

Listen to someone speaking.

Listen to the wind.

Listen to the sound of silence.

Listen intently.

It does not matter whether you perceive many sounds or one particular sound, but listen to the outside world as though it is something strange to you.

Then after some minutes, again be aware of the breathing process.

Do not listen to outer sounds . . . only perceive the flow of breath.

Fix your whole attention on the breath.

Then after some time again perceive outer sounds.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

This is stage 1 of antar mouna.

Readiness for stage 2

The aim is to reach a stage where one is completely accustomed to and detached from outside sensations, especially sounds, so that they do not influence the mind. It is possible to introvert and be unaffected even if a train passes nearby, or even if a mosquito starts buzzing around you. If you have reached this stage then you are ready to proceed to stage 2¹.

Preparation for other meditative techniques

Antar mouna stage 1 is an excellent preparatory practice for other meditative methods, including kriya yoga. If you have the time, practise it before doing other meditative techniques.

Notes

¹ Antar mouna: Stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5; Stage 3 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5; Stage 4 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 5; Stage 5 – Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4; Stage 6 – Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 6

² For details on traditional meditative asanas refer to Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Daily Practice Program

Now you should integrate kriya number 3, nada sanchalana, with the previous two kriyas from Lesson 25. The approximate time required for the three practices is about 21 minutes, which should leave spare time to practise other techniques. Carefully read our second discussion on kriya yoga and bear it in mind both during your daily program and in your day to day life.

In this lesson we have introduced antar mouna and described stage 1. If you have time try to practise it.

Practise and perfect either setu asana or chakrasana, according to your ability. If you can do chakrasana then there is no need to do setu asana; if you cannot do chakrasana, then practise setu asana as an alternative.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	10
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Chakrasana or Setu Asana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	15
Chakra Shuddhi	13
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Antar Mouna – Stage 1	20
Chidakasha Dharana	6
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	7
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Chakrasana or Setu Asana	3
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Nadi Shodhana with Maha Bandha	7
Chakra Shuddhi	8
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Antar Mouna – Stage 1	15
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Halasana	4
Chakrasana or Setu Asana	3
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Antar Mouna – Stage 1	11
	60

Lesson 27

Kriya yoga is a rite, a ceremony, a method, a sadhana. It is an ancient, scientific and time-tested means to harmonize naturally occurring energies within the human framework so that they resonate with the more subtle underlying energies. It is a method of refining one's physical, psychic and mental forces so that individual awareness can penetrate the depths of one's nature. It systematically 'sharpens the point' of individual being.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Naturopathy

Naturopathy is a system of medicine which aims at restoring health and eliminating disease by building up the vitality of the body. Few of us have the experience of good health; we assume that because we are not actually ill, then we are healthy. But there is a vast spectrum of states between health and disease; not just black and white, but a thousand shades of grey.

Good health is a state of physical and mental wellbeing, where a person experiences buoyant spirits, abundant energy and the complete absence of body pain. All organs and body systems work efficiently, cell metabolism is normal and all the vital processes of the body are being properly maintained. In addition, there are good reserves available to enable the body to suffer stress and privation for a considerable time without breakdown. The level of vitality is high and potential for work excellent.

Disease, on the other hand, is a morbid process where the cell metabolism of one or more organs has deviated from the normal path. This derangement of metabolism is commonly caused by:

1. Dietary imbalance and deficiency
2. Poor living habits, such as shallow breathing, lack of exercise, rushed meals, negative thinking
3. Stress due to nervous tension, sudden environmental changes, occupational pressures.

In naturopathic theory, all disease first appears at the cell level of the body. Typical stages of a disease process are:

1. Mineral and vitamin concentrations fall
2. Enzyme action slows; vital enzymes cease to function
3. Metabolism slows and alters
4. Metabolic wastes build up
5. The cell membrane degenerates
6. Inflammation and pain are produced as warnings

7. Bacteria manifest and multiply, feeding off the waste
8. Toxins produced by the bacteria cause further cellular injury
9. Cell membranes disintegrate, the action of the organs is seriously impaired and their integrity is threatened
10. Degeneration of the organ sets in.

The results of this disease process will show up in several ways. There will certainly be a drop in the efficiency of the organ. Everything it normally produces, essential to the wellbeing of the body (hormones, special nutrients, blood cells, etc.) will be produced in much smaller quantities. At this stage a person would notice a lowering of energy and loss of the feeling of wellbeing. As wastes and toxins build up, pain, fever and inflammation will occur. Fever and inflammation are in themselves quite useful devices. Fever raises body temperature, enabling wastes and toxins to be burned up, at the same time encouraging elimination by sweating. Some bacteria can live only in temperatures close to that of the normal body, and so the fever may effectively kill many kinds. Inflammation dilates blood vessels in the organ, giving increased blood supply of nutrients and rebuilding materials and allowing more efficient removal of toxins. At the same time, the blood immunity mechanism is activated and white blood cells are able to easily move in and reach the bacteria. By now the person would be well aware of a disease process, as there may even be severe reactions such as vomiting, diarrhoea and bleeding, all of which are extreme reactions to a situation rapidly going out of control. At this point the disease process becomes acute and if major bleeding occurs unchecked, the whole vital process may cease. Vomiting and diarrhoea are not in themselves any great cause for alarm, as they are natural rejection processes and if they are allowed to continue, will do much to clear out the problem.

The question of cure is rather like having a growing pile of rubbish, infested with flies which are producing additional disease agents. There are three major alternatives:

1. Kill the flies using chemical sprays and leave the rubbish pile to grow in volume and toxicity.
2. Remove the rubbish by a thorough cleaning but leave the actual source of rubbish production.
3. Go to the root cause of the problem and determine why the rubbish is being produced. The cause is seldom difficult to spot. The most commonly occurring problems are disorders in water balance and mineral supply.

The use of antibiotics and inflammation suppressing drugs will solve the problem of bacterial infestation and pain with inflammation, thus alleviating many symptoms, but is obviously no real cure.

A cleansing process, such as a fast, will eliminate the waste accumulation if the body still has reserves of vital energy to draw on, but may or may not supply the deficient items. If the body is seriously depleted of energy, a fast may actually accelerate the disease process.

Strangely enough, even though the cause of the disease process may be found fairly easily, the cure may take some time. For what a naturopath really seeks to do is not merely to diagnose a cause, but to correct mistakes in living. Quite often, it is a combination of poor diet, poor living habits and stress which is causing the problem, and to correct these is often no easy matter, human nature being what it is. What is needed is a system of therapy which can supply energies of highly specific types to a devitalized system. The specific energies supplied, of course, will depend on the person and the problem. The following methods are commonly used, although there are many peripheral ones which are sometimes astonishingly quick in their action.

Diet

Signs of vitamin and mineral deficiency are noted. These are given in tablet form, in natural preparations which the body can absorb easily without strain. Foods containing these missing factors are suggested to be included in the diet. Often an essential item is missing – a common one is unsaturated fatty acids. Often the diet is

very high in acid forming foods (meat, dairy products, eggs, fish, grains) and low in alkaline forming foods (fresh raw fruit and vegetables) causing excessive waste build-up in the tissues. Even though adequate cell function can be restored by altering the diet, wastes must be cleared and organs (and often the whole body) revitalized. Often foods are not of sufficient energy content to do this and herbal remedies then find their usage.

Herbs

There is a wide range of herbs available (apart from the well known culinary varieties) which have a highly successful usage in naturopathic practice. Each, because of its specific quality, can supply vital energy in a highly concentrated form to specific organs, so enabling them to regain their normal functions in a far shorter time than would be possible from dietary therapy alone. Little is known of how herbs work. On analysis, they are found to have high concentrations of vitamins and minerals, each herb having of course a different combination of active substances. In addition, highly complex organic molecules of unknown action are consistently found. They undoubtedly contribute to the action of the herb, perhaps in a major fashion. Except for a few notable exceptions, such as foxglove or digitalis, the medicinal usage of herbs has been largely uninvestigated. This is a great pity, for their usefulness has been well established for centuries.

Fasting

This is a very powerful cleansing technique but should be used with care. A fast can extend anywhere from one day to about six weeks. The most powerful, but also the most difficult, is the water fast. Next in strength is the juice fast and then the so-called, mono-diet. Fasting relies on the body having sufficient vitality to initiate its own cleansing process once the digestive load is removed, for digestion is a process which requires considerable energy. The larger or more indigestible the meal, the more energy is required by the intestines to secrete digestive enzymes and to absorb and transport the digested food through the intestinal wall. The intestines, in common with all mucus membranes, can be used as an eliminative organ as well as an assimilative

one. That is, it can also secrete waste products of metabolism in the reverse direction, out of the bloodstream through the wall and into the intestinal tube. This will only occur when the digestive load is small or nil, so different types of fasts have different effects on the body.

A water fast, in which large quantities of pure water alone are drunk, imposes almost no assimilative load on digestion and in addition provides a useful flushing medium. A juice fast is quite different in action. As well as supplying a liquid volume for flushing, the juice replenishes exhausted cell vitamin and mineral supplies, while the sugar supplies some useful energy. The organic acids such as citric and malic acid yield the valuable bicarbonation after metabolism, which neutralizes acid wastes and replenishes the cell buffer systems. Many more pints of juice can be taken per day in this manner than for the equivalent amount of solid foods.

A more gentle system of fasting is the mono-diet in which only one form of food is taken. In this category come the milk diet, the grape cure and the brown rice diet of macrobiotic fame. In fact any one food can be taken, fruits being generally the most useful. This type of fast has the advantage that it does not interfere greatly with the daily routine, beyond the fact that large amounts of food are usually taken, sometimes about ten pounds of grapes per day. Food of this type, by virtue of its simplicity, imposes a much lower digestive load on the intestines, at the same time still supplying basic nutrients to the system.

In all fasts, elimination through the intestines must be helped by regular enemas, since the bulk may not be enough for normal bowel action. The best enemas are catnip or raspberry leaf herbal teas; slippery elm tea is also good. Soap and water should never be given. It works well enough, but its action on the delicate bowel membrane is excessively irritating. If possible a daily enema of four pints of water should be taken slowly and held for twenty minutes. This allows for maximum cleansing of the whole large intestine. In fact you will be utterly astonished at the result of this descaling process.

Spinal manipulation and massage

To be strictly correct, these belong to the closely associated fields of osteopathy and

chiropractic. They are commonly used as an adjunct in naturopathic practices. In theory, a basic requirement for the proper function of any organ is that it receives its normal nerve supply from the central nervous system. If the nerve supply is blocked at any point, such as by pinching due to misaligned spinal vertebrae, then the organ to which this nerve force was directed suffers abnormal function and as a result may move into a diseased state. In such a case, it is commonly found:

1. The muscles surrounding the misaligned spinal bones have gone into spasm to immobilize the area and prevent further injury.
2. Crystallization has built up as a further precaution and as a result of stress to the tissue.
3. The body has accommodated to the pain and the lack of mobility, and quite often the patient is unaware of any problem at all.
4. The organ thus out of balance is involved in considerable malfunctioning at the metabolic level, and so dietary and herbal therapies are frequently required also.

Homeopathy

Frequently, for deep-seated conditions and for mental states, the naturopath will employ some homeopathic remedies. This is quite an old form of medicine based on a very little investigated property of matter: the properties it possesses when diluted down to infinitesimal concentrations under special conditions. Orthodox chemistry and medicine would state that there is nothing in the solution except water, yet this water has astonishing properties.

Summary

Naturopathy in effect is a system of therapies, all based on the one aim to revitalize the body by whatever means the patient will try. For the philosophy has it that in building health and vitality, disease will take care of itself.

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 4: PAWAN SANCHALANA (ROTATION OF BREATH CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *pawan* means 'breath'; *sanchalana* means 'rotation' or 'conduction'. Therefore, this kriya can be called 'the rotation (or conduction) of breath consciousness'. It comes immediately after nada sanchalana¹.

Sitting position

Traditionally one should sit in either padmasana or siddhasana (siddha yoni asana for females). These postures keep the back straight yet relaxed for long periods².

If you cannot sit comfortably in any of these above asanas, then sit in any comfortable position. Be sure to keep your spine erect throughout the practice.

Hands can be placed on your lap or on your knees, as you wish. If you wish you can do jnana, chin or chinmaya mudra³.

Psychic passage awareness and mental repetition

As in kriya number 3 you will be required to rotate your awareness through the arohan and awarohan psychic pathways. You should mentally repeat the name of each chakra and kshetram in turn as your awareness passes through them. The process is as follows:

When your awareness reaches mooladhara you should mentally repeat three times: 'mooladhara . . . mooladhara . . . mooladhara'. Then mentally say the word 'arohan', immediately before ascending the arohan psychic passage.

Ascend the arohan passage as you breathe in. Feel each kshetram in turn and mentally repeat their names once: 'swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna'.

Then when your awareness reaches bindu you should mentally repeat three times: 'bindu . . . bindu . . . bindu'.

Say the word 'awarohan' once immediately before descending the awarohan passage.

Descend the awarohan as you exhale. Feel each chakra in turn and mentally repeat their names once: 'ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana'.

Then the process is repeated with mental repetition of the word mooladhara three times.

Subsidiary practices

To do pawan sanchalana you should be familiar with the following basic techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama⁴
2. Unmani mudra¹
3. Khechari mudra⁴

Ujjayi and unmani mudra are an integral part of nada sanchalana, so you should be able to do them. Khechari mudra is introduced here into the kriya yoga practices for the first time. It is very simple and will be an integral technique in many of the forthcoming kriyas.

Technique

After completing nada sanchalana (kriya number 3) you should immediately begin to practise pawan sanchalana. Do not change your sitting position.

Hold your spine straight.

Open the eyes.

Fold your tongue into khechari mudra; practise khechari throughout the entire practice, though you can release the tongue lock for a short duration if you feel discomfort. Exhale deeply.

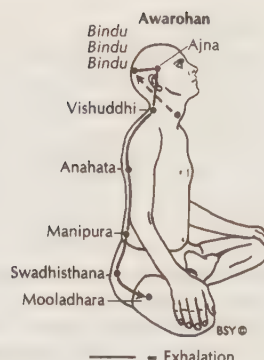
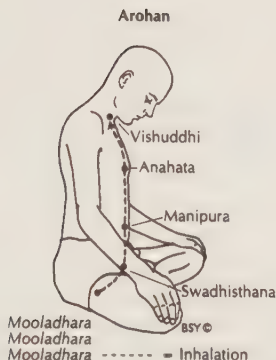
Bend your head forwards but without any tension.

Direct your awareness to the area of mooladhara chakra.

The first round starts here.

Mentally repeat: 'mooladhara . . . mooladhara . . . mooladhara'.

If you wish you can slightly contract the mooladhara chakra area with each mental pronunciation.



Say 'arohan' once mentally.

Begin your ascent up the frontal arohan passage as you breathe in with ujjayi.

As you ascend be aware of each kshetram in turn and say its name once mentally.

There should be a continuous flow of awareness from one kshetram to the next.

As your awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu your head should slowly rise.

At bindu your head should lean slightly backwards.

Your inhalation should end when your awareness reaches bindu.

Mentally repeat: 'bindu . . . bindu . . . bindu'; 3 times only with complete awareness of the area of bindu.

Then mentally say 'awarohan' once and begin to descend through the spinal awarohan psychic passage.

The descent of awareness should be synchronized with exhalation in ujjayi.

Be aware of each chakra in turn and mentally repeat its name once.

As your awareness descends from bindu to mooladhara you should practise unmani mudra.

On reaching mooladhara, the eyes should be nearly or completely closed.

At mooladhara let your head gently bend forwards.

Open your eyes. This is the end of the first round. The process is summarized in the above pictures.

Then start the second round.

Mentally repeat: 'mooladhara . . . mooladhara . . . mooladhara'.

Then mentally say 'arohan' once and begin to ascend the frontal arohan passage.

Do 49 rounds.

Breathing

Ujjayi breathing throughout the practice. Hold the breath for a short time while repeating mooladhara three times. Inhale as you ascend the frontal arohan passage. Hold your breath for a short duration while repeating the word bindu three times. Exhale as you descend the spinal awarohan passage.

Mental turmoil

If your mind is disturbed, let your breathing become deeper and faster. Do not suppress the thoughts. If your mind is reasonably calm and one-pointed, let the breath be slower and more subtle, with little noise.

Energizing

This is a long practice, it is easy to become bored and sleepy. Try to feel that you are being energized with each breath. Feel the prana building up in intensity and piercing each chakra and kshetram in turn. This will help to prevent sleep.

Awareness

Maintain awareness throughout the practice. Fix your awareness on the ujjayi respiration, the piercing of the chakras and kshetrams, mental repetition and unmani mudra.

Sequence

Pawan sanchalana should be done immediately after nada sanchalana, before shabda sanchalana⁵.

Duration

You should do 49 complete rounds. This will take about 25 to 30 minutes depending on the depth and duration of breathing.

Counting of rounds

In this kriya you are strongly advised to use a mala to record the number of rounds as you do them. You will find it difficult to record mentally or with your fingers. Tie a knot between the forty-ninth and fiftieth bead after the sumeru bead, in the same way as described for nada sanchalana¹. As you complete each round rotate the mala through one bead. That is rotate the mala when your awareness returns to the mooladhara chakra.

If you do not have a mala, then we suggest that you try to contact any experienced teachers or ashram and try to purchase one. A 108 bead mala is best. Tulsi, rudraksha, sandalwood and so on can be used according to your preference.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 3

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁵ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

Usually it is very difficult, if not impossible, to find a suitable place for asana practice during a busy workday. Moreover, it is not possible to continually carry a blanket around. Here we will describe pada hastasana and three of its variations: pada angusthasana, uthita janu sirshasana and dynamic pada hastasana. These asanas can be practised at any time and place without the slightest preparation. They are all forward bending asanas; in fact they can be best described as standing variations of paschimottasana¹. They are all ideal for loosening up the spine, removing aches and pains in the back, neck and head and for removing fatigue.

PADA HASTASANA (HAND TO FOOT OR FORWARD BENDING POSE)

Definition

The Sanskrit word *pada* means 'foot' and the word *hasta* means 'hand'. Therefore, the exact English translation is 'foot-hand pose'. It is an asana in which the hands are placed on or near the feet. The asana is also widely called 'the forward bending asana' for obvious reasons.

Technique

There are five stages.

Stage 1: starting position

Stand upright. Place the feet together. Let the arms relax and hang beside the body. Try to relax the whole body, while breathing normally. Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: the forward bend

Inhale deeply. While slowly exhaling bend the body forwards. Firstly let the head bend forwards without muscular effort. Then let the trunk progressively bend forwards. Let the arms remain limp through the forward

bend so that they dangle vertically towards the floor.

While bending try to imagine that your body has no bones or muscles.

At the end of exhalation, your head and trunk should point towards the floor.

You should try to let your head hang as closely as possible to the knees, but without any strain. Remain immobile in this position and breathe normally a number of times.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: accentuation of bend

Beginners will find it difficult to hold their feet with their hands or touch the knees with their head; there is insufficient spinal flexibility.

You should hold your legs as near as possible to the feet.

If you are very stiff then you can hold the back of your calves; if you are less stiff then you can hold the back of your ankles.

The palms should face forwards and be in contact with the back of the legs.

Then practise as follows:

Relax your back muscles.

Keep the legs straight.

Breathe in deeply.

Then with exhalation try to bring your forehead towards the knees.

Do not strain.

The head should be gently pulled towards the knees by slowly tensing the arm muscles.

The back and leg muscles should remain passive.

Do not worry if you cannot touch your head to your knees – this will come with regular practice as your back muscles become more supple.

Under no circumstances should you use excessive muscular force.

If you cannot touch your head to the knees, then merely bend forwards as far as you can comfortably.

This is the final pose of stage 3.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Remain in this position for a minute or so, allowing the back muscles to relax and stretch. Then proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: spinal flexion

In this stage it is best if you can hold your legs just above the ankles; if you cannot do this then you can hold your legs at a higher point. Twist your arms so that the palms face backwards while still holding your legs. Keep your hands fixed in this position throughout. Breathe out deeply.

Then as you breathe in move your body as follows:

Raise your head and shoulders forwards and upwards as high as comfortably possible. Simultaneously you should tense your arm muscles and try to pull your lower back downwards.

This is difficult to describe; if you try for yourself you will understand.

The lower and middle part of the back has to be pulled downwards by bending and tensing the arms; the head and shoulders have to be raised as high as possible.

This movement will apply a powerful tension and stimulation to the whole spine.

You will also feel a strong contraction of the abdominal muscles.

Hold your breath while applying this flexion in the spine.

This is the final pose for stage 4.

Then release the flexion.

Breathe out and repeat stage 3; that is, try to touch your head to your knees.

Breathe deeply and slowly for a short duration. Then repeat stage 4.

Stages 3 and 4 can be done one after the other for as long as you have available time.

Stage 5: return to the starting position

When you have done stage 3 and 4 a number of times release the hands from the legs.

Let them dangle as though without muscles and bones.

As you breathe in, slowly raise the body to the erect position.

This is 1 complete round of pada hastasana. If you have time do another round.

Breathing

Breathe through the nose throughout the practice. Normal breathing in the starting

pose. Breathe out as you lean forwards. Breathe normally at the end of the forward bend (that is, at the end of stage 2). After deep inhalation, exhale as you draw your head towards the knees (stage 3). Breathe slowly and deeply while holding the head against or near the knees (stage 3). Breathe in as you raise your head and shoulders and tense the lower and middle spine (stage 4). Hold your breath while holding this flexion. Breathe out as you again try to touch the head to the knees (stage 3). Breathe in as you raise the body to the starting position. Coordinate breathing with physical movement throughout the practice. This will bring more benefits and will also make the asana easier to do.

Awareness

Be aware of:

1. relaxation of the back muscles
2. breathing
3. physical movement

Mistakes to avoid

- *Bending the legs:* The legs should remain straight throughout the entire practice. It is easy to touch the head to the knees if the legs are bent; even a person with the stiffest back can do it. But one will gain little benefit, for the back and leg muscles will remain as stiff as ever even if you practise for ten years. So keep your legs straight even though it may be difficult.
- *Tensing the back and leg muscles:* The back and leg muscles should remain passive throughout the practice (except in stage 4). Often people tense their back and leg muscles in an effort to increase the forward bend. This is defeating the object, for this muscular effort makes the back stiffer and reduces the amount that the body can bend forwards. Let the muscles relax; they will slowly elongate and become more flexible.
- *Jerking:* Every movement should be done slowly and smoothly without sudden jerks.

Precautions

Do not bend your spine more than its present flexibility will allow. Know and accept your limitations and do not exceed them. Slowly your spinal muscles will become more and more supple with constant practice; also your muscles will elongate slightly.

Limitations

People who suffer from the following ailments should not do pada hastasana:

- slipped disc
- heart problems
- high blood pressure
- abdominal hernia
- severe sciatica

Duration and time of practice

Pada hastasana can be done for as long as you wish. A good duration is three to five minutes. Practise any time, whenever you have the time to spare, but do not practise after meals.

Benefits

Pada hastasana gives basically the same benefits as paschimottanasana¹. It massages and tones up the digestive organs, helping to improve digestion and eliminate ailments such as constipation.

A widespread symptom of modern living is back, neck and headache. These are generally caused by chronic stress and worry, muscular tension, displacement of vertebrae and compression of associated nerves and most commonly by a bad sitting position for extended periods of time. Pada hastasana helps to eliminate these causes and prevents pain in the spine and head. It is a particularly useful asana to do during work when these aches and pains easily arise.

Pada hastasana is very beneficial for relocating minor displacements of the spinal vertebrae and for releasing nerves that are pinched by slightly displaced vertebrae (as in sciatica). Simultaneously, pada hastasana strengthens the spinal muscles, this often being the cause of slipped disc. Therefore, this is a useful asana for preventing sciatica and slipped disc and also treating mild cases after they have occurred. However, one should seek guidance before attempting to treat either of these two ailments; otherwise you may do more harm than good.

Pada hastasana can be described as a semi-inverted asana. The upper part of the body is turned upside down for most of the practice, improving blood flow to the brain and improving its efficiency. Inversion of the body also improves the blood supply to the pituitary and thyroid glands. Most inverted asanas require time, preparation and a quiet place. Pada

hastasana can be practised at any time to give most of the benefits of traditional inverted asanas (though at a lesser level)². Often during a busy work day, the blood supply to the brain can become a little sluggish. Pada hastasana helps to stimulate this blood circulation; this brings many benefits. The following are a few:

- removes fatigue and brings vitality
- improves concentration
- improves metabolic process of the body (by acting on the thyroid and pituitary)
- helps to decongest the nose

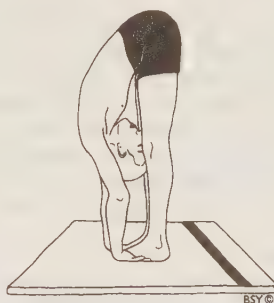
To gain these benefits, repeat stages 2 and 4 one after the other for a few minutes. This will allow sufficient time for the extra blood to flow to the head.

Pada hastasana brings many other benefits. It stretches the leg muscles, tones up the sexual organs and glands and so forth.

Variations

There are many variations of pada hastasana. The following are three.

PADA ANGUSHTHASANA (TIPTOE POSE)



The Sanskrit word *angustha* means, both 'thumb' and 'big toe'; *pada* means 'foot'. Therefore, this asana can also be called 'the thumb to big toe pose'.

It can only be done by people with reasonably flexible spinal muscles. It is done in exactly the same way as pada hastasana. The only difference is the position of the hands.

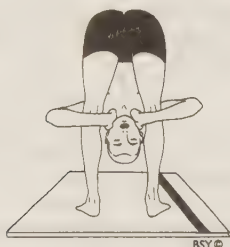
- Those people who can easily touch their toes but who cannot place their palms flat on the floor should hold their big toes with the thumb, index and middle fingers.
- Those who can place their palms flat on the ground should place their hands under the

front of the feet, palms facing upwards. This is shown in the above figure. The fingers point towards the heels.

This is one method. An alternative method is to wrap the hands around the side of the feet so that the fingers point towards each other.

To do pada angushthasana you should do stages 1, 2 and 3 of pada hastasana, omitting stage 4. The benefits are basically the same as pada hastasana though the flexion of the back is greater.

UTTHITA JANU SIRSHASANA (UPWARD FACING HEAD BETWEEN KNEES POSE)



The Sanskrit word *utthita* means 'raised' or 'upwards'; *janu* means 'knee' and *sirsha* means 'head'. The English translation is rather long: 'the upward facing head between the knees pose'. The asana is so called because the head is placed between the knees with the face upwards. This asana is sometimes called 'utthan asana'. Only people with very flexible backs should attempt to do this asana.

Technique

Stand upright with the legs about 25 cms apart. Let the arms hang limply beside the body. Do stage 2 as described for pada hastasana. Bend the legs at the knees.

While exhaling wrap the arms horizontally around the back of the knees, elbows pointing outwards.

Relax the body.

Breathe normally for a short period.

Then exhale deeply.

Try to place the fingers on the back of the neck.

Try to slowly straighten the legs without letting the fingers slip from the back of the neck.

Do not strain; apply a little force to straighten the legs, but not too much.

The action of straightening the legs will apply a strong leverage on the spine and a firm compression of the abdomen.

The final pose is shown.

The legs should be as straight as is comfortably possible.

The face should look backwards and upwards. Breathe deeply and slowly.

Hold the final pose for a minute or so.

Then bend the legs and relax.

Return to the final pose by again straightening the legs.

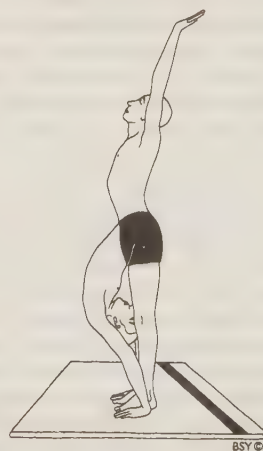
Stay in the final pose for a comfortable duration, breathing deeply.

Release the final pose.

Then either repeat the final pose or return to the starting position as described in stage 5 of pada hastasana.

All other details are as described for pada hastasana. The benefits are the same though more intense.

DYNAMIC PADA HASTASANA (DYNAMIC FORWARD BENDING POSE)



This is the easiest form of pada hastasana. It can be done by anyone except those listed under the heading 'Limitations' given for pada hastasana. It is very useful for removing excess weight, limbering up the body and for maintaining general good health. It is a good substitute for surya namaskara³.

Technique

Stand erect with the feet together and legs straight.

Raise the arms above the head, leaning backwards slightly.

Breathe out and bend forwards.

Try to touch your hands to the floor.

If this is impossible then touch the tips of your fingers on the floor.

If this is impossible then bend forwards as much as possible reaching towards the ground.

Keep the legs straight throughout.

Breathe in and raise the body to the starting pose.

This is 1 round.

In the starting position, try to bend your back backwards but without strain.

Do as many rounds as you can without fatigue.

Up to 20 is a reasonable number.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

Pranayama: Bhastrika Pranayama

So far in this book we have described four types of pranayama techniques. These are as follows:

1. Samaveta¹
2. Ujjayi²
3. Bhramari³
4. Nadi shodhana⁴

All of these techniques have distinctive characteristics and benefits. Perfection of bhramari alone or nadi shodhana alone can lead to meditation. Nothing else is required.

There are a few more basic and traditional types of pranayama techniques. One of them, bhastrika, will be discussed here. This practice is also very distinctive and can give many benefits on all levels, whether physical, pranic or mental.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *bhastrika* means ‘bellows’. Thus the practice can be called ‘the bellows pranayama’. This practice is so called because air is drawn forcefully and quickly in and out of the lungs like the bellows of a village blacksmith. The blacksmith increases the flow of air into a fire in order to produce more heat for his work. Bhastrika pranayama can be said to do the same thing: it increases the flow of air into the body, which produces inner heat, both gross and subtle. The inner fire of the mind-body is stoked. This heat burns up impurities, whether physical impurities such as toxins, pranic blockages, or mental neuroses. The Sanskrit word *tapas* means ‘to burn one’s impurities’. Bhastrika pranayama is one method, a very direct method of self-purification through tapas.

Scriptural references

Bhastrika is an important practice of pranayama. It is therefore widely mentioned in various scriptures. However, some of these descriptions are very vague. For example in the *Gheranda Samhita* it says: “Draw air in and

out of your nostrils over and over again like blacksmith’s bellows.” (v. 5:74)

“Inhale deeply twenty times. Do kumbhaka (retain breath). Then exhale in the way already explained. Wise men practise bhastrika three times every day and never suffer from any disease. They grow healthier day by day.” (v. 5:75, 76) This explanation is not given so much for specific instruction but for remembrance. The actual details were intended to be given by a guru.

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* there are a few verses which describe the practice. These are as follows: “Place both feet on the thighs and sit comfortably in padmasana. This is the destroyer of all impurities. Lock the pose and keep the neck and abdomen in one straight line. Keeping the mouth closed, exhale through the two nostrils. The exhalation should be such that it makes a sound from the heart to the forehead. Then quickly inhale and fill the lungs.

“Again exhale and inhale. Do this over and over again like the blacksmith’s bellows. Air should be moved in and out of the body until you feel tired. Then inhale through the right nostril so that the abdomen expands (like a balloon). Close the nostrils with the fingers and retain the breath. Then after retention, exhale through the left nostril.

“This practice removes disease caused by kapha, pitta and vata (gross and subtle elements in the body). It increases the digestive fire. The flow of prana is revitalized. The practice helps to awaken the kundalini by destroying blockages, including the brahma, vishnu and rudra granthis⁵. You are especially recommended to practise bhastrika pranayama.” (v. 2:59–67)

Although this is a much fuller explanation, a person would still find it difficult to practise correctly using only reference to this text. Incidentally, the method described is slightly different from the method that we will shortly describe. This is not surprising for bhastrika

has many minor variations. Even today many ashrams and schools teach slightly different variations of *bhastrika*. Each has its place in the sphere of yoga. The method that we teach is one that we have thoroughly tested.

Body position

Sit in any comfortable *asana*. Any of the traditional *asanas*, such as *padmasana*, *siddhasana*, etc. are best. Your spine should be held upright throughout the practice⁶.

Control of breath through the nostrils

During the practice, the breath flow has to be directed firstly through the left nostril, then through the right nostril and then through both nostrils together. The method of control is to use *nasagra mudra*.

The right hand is normally used, but if you wish you can use your left hand. The second and third fingers should rest firmly on the forehead. The little finger is not used. The flow of breath through each nostril is controlled by the thumb and ring finger. If you use your right hand, then flow of breath through the left nostril is induced by pressing the thumb against the right nostril. Conversely, breath flow through the right nostril is induced by pressing the ring finger against the left nostril wall. If you use your left hand for control then the same will apply, but with the roles of thumb and right finger reversed.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Hold the head and back straight.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body.

Stage 1: left nostril respiration

Raise your right hand in front of your face and do *nasagra mudra*.

The other hand should rest in your lap or on your knee.

Close the right nostril with the thumb.

Breathe forcefully and quickly through the left nostril 10 times.

The pumping action should be done by the expansion and contraction of the abdomen; try not to use your chest.

Forceful exhalation is induced by firmly and quickly contracting the abdominal muscles.

Forceful inhalation is induced by fully expanding the abdominal muscles.

The whole process of breathing should be rapid and rhythmical.

You should do it sufficiently fast so that you hear a snuffing sound in the nose as you breathe in and out.

Then, after completing 10 rapid respirations, breathe in deeply through the left nostril; keep the right nostril closed.

Fill the lungs as much as possible by expanding both the chest and the abdomen.

Hold your breath. Close both nostrils.

Press your chin against the chest. Contract the throat so that it is locked; this is the same as *jalandhara bandha*, but without the arm lock⁷.

Also contract the perineum, the area of the *mooladhara chakra*, as in *moola bandha*⁸.

Hold the breath for as long as you can.

Do not strain.

Mentally count the duration of breath retention.

Then raise your head.

Release the pressure of the ring finger.

Breathe out slowly through the left nostril.

Then begin stage 2.

Stage 2: right nostril respiration

Close your left nostril.

Open the right nostril.

Breathe in and out deeply and rapidly through the right nostril 10 times.

Remember: the abdominal expansion and contraction should act as the bellows that induce air into the lungs and then push it out again.

Then inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril.

Hold your breath. Close both nostrils.

Press your chin against the chest.

Contract the throat to form *jalandhara bandha*.

Contract the area of *mooladhara chakra*.

Mentally count the duration of breath retention.

Raise your head.

Release the blockage of the right nostril and breathe out slowly through the right nostril.

Proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: respiration through both nostrils

Open both nostrils.

Breathe in and out deeply and rapidly 10 times through both nostrils together.

Then inhale deeply and slowly through both nostrils.

Close both nostrils with the thumb and ring finger.

Hold your breath.

Press your chin against the chest.

Contract both throat and mooladhara chakra areas.

Mentally count the duration of breath retention. After a comfortable length of time raise your head.

Release the pressure on both nostrils.

Breathe out slowly through both nostrils.

This is the end of stage 3 and also the end of 1 complete round.

One round is stage 1 + stage 2 + stage 3.

Start another round.

Breathing

The mouth should be closed throughout the practice; only breathe through the nose. The following is a brief summary of the breathing sequence for one complete round.

Stage 1: rapid respiration through the left nostril. Deep inhalation through the left nostril. Retention. Exhalation through the left nostril.

Stage 2: same as stage 1 but through the right nostril.

Stage 3: same as stage 1 and 2 but through both nostrils.

Correct method of rapid respiration

It is widely believed that most of the breathing process is induced by expansion and contraction of the chest. This is totally wrong, or rather it is if one breathes correctly. Most of the air is induced into the lungs because of expansion and contraction of the abdomen. Some air is drawn into the lungs because of chest expansion, but not as much as by abdominal induction.

In bhastrika pranayama, one should breathe in and out rapidly using only the abdomen. The movement of the chest should be minimized. There will be some movement of the chest, of course, but it should be passive. The respiration should be performed by conscious and accentuated movement of the abdomen. Some will find this difficult, for the abdominal muscles will have become lazy through lack of use. But with practice you will find it easier and easier as you regain the normal muscular control of the abdomen during breathing. This practice is especially recommended for those people who don't breathe correctly.

Rest between rounds

Bhastrika is a dynamic practice and requires a large expenditure of physical energy. This will apply more to beginners, who lack control over their abdominal muscles. You should not exhaust yourself. If you wish you can take a short rest between each full round. That is, you can breathe in and out slowly a few times with complete relaxation before continuing the next round.

With practice you will find that you do not require much energy to rapidly expand and contract the abdomen. It will almost move spontaneously without effort. In this case you can dispense with these periods of rest.

Awareness

Maintain awareness of the breathing process, physical movements and mental counting.

Sequence and time of practice

The best time to practise bhastrika pranayama is after asana practice and immediately before starting meditative techniques. Bhastrika has a wonderful effect on the mind. It induces an intense but relaxed state of wakefulness. This is a good foundation for meditation practice.

Bhastrika should not be done with a full stomach. Therefore, the best time is early in the morning before breakfast. The *Gheranda Samhita* suggests that it should be practised three times every day. This is perfectly acceptable if you are on a restricted diet. This does not apply to the average person living in society.

Blockage of the nose

It is impossible to practise bhastrika if the nose is blocked. The best way to overcome this problem is to do jala neti either immediately before practising bhastrika or before your asana practice⁹.

Number of deep respirations

In the practice we have suggested that you breathe rapidly 10 times. This is the number that you should do if you have just begun bhastrika. As your abdominal muscles become stronger with regular practice then you can increase the number of rapid respirations. Increase by 5 respirations every week. Some people do 200 rapid and deep respirations and more, but you should only practise a suitable

number within your capacity. A reasonable number is 50 respirations after a few months practice.

Duration of retention

When you first start bhastrika, only hold your breath for a short period, say five to ten seconds. With practice you can increase the duration until you can hold your breath for a minute or more. However, don't strain. You should mentally count the duration of retention.

Number of rounds

1 round = stage 1 + stage 2 + stage 3.

Beginners will find it difficult to do more than 3 complete rounds, without feeling tired. Do not exhaust yourself. Practise a comfortable number of rounds, no more. With regular practice you can increase the number of rounds.

Some practitioners practise bhastrika pranayama continuously for hours and hours. This charges the whole system and is a very good sadhana. However, this amount of vigorous practice should only be done when the body is in perfect health, in suitable surroundings and with a strictly regulated diet. We do not advise the reader to undertake such practice, without seeking expert guidance. If you eat the wrong food and practise too many rounds of bhastrika, then you will become ill.

We suggest that you do not practise more than 10 complete rounds without guidance. This does not sound very much, but actually it will take about 40 to 50 minutes to complete this number of rounds. This is more than one can fit into a busy day.

Precautions

The practice should be stopped immediately if you feel:

- fainting
- excessive perspiration
- excessive shaking of the body
- vomiting

The practice requires forceful and rapid respiration. This does not mean that one should use extreme force. There is no need to grit the teeth or contort the face. The respirations should be done rhythmically and with control. In fact they should be done with an attitude of relaxation.

Limitations

Bhastrika should not be practised by people who suffer from:

- high blood pressure
- any heart ailments
- hernia
- vertigo

Bhastrika is ideal for purifying the blood and removing a bad complexion. However, this purification should be slow. If you do too much bhastrika then all the impurities in the blood will be ejected from the body in a mighty torrent. This may result in massive boils or other skin eruptions in the initial stages of practice. We suggest that you proceed steadily but surely. Let the impurities be removed slowly. In this manner you are less likely to get painful boils or skin eruptions.

Benefits

Bhastrika pranayama brings a wide range of benefits that span the whole spectrum of the human being. The following is a brief summary of the main benefits.

Opens up the air cells of the lungs: Most people do not breathe properly – the breathing tends to be shallow. The lungs are not fully used and exercised and the small air cells (alveoli) in the bottom of the lungs tend to stay permanently closed. Mucus builds up and acts as the fertile soil for the growth of germs and disease. Also, when the air cells remain permanently closed the blood is not fully oxygenated. Those parts of the lungs that are open allow oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange, while the closed or blocked parts don't. This results in 'mismatching', a condition where one part of the lungs gives more transfer than other parts. The overall effect is decreased oxygen content in the blood. That is, instead of an ideal 100% oxygenation there is only say 70%. This results in decreased oxygenation of the body tissues and general weakness and bad health.

Bhastrika directly opens up closed air cells. Germs, mucus and possibly stagnant air are eliminated from the lungs. All the air cells are cleaned and rejuvenated from top to bottom, which leads to an increased transfer of oxygen through the cell membranes and allows better removal of waste carbon dioxide from the body. This results in better health of the whole body and increased vitality.

Bhastrika purifies the lungs. This makes it a very useful technique for combating ailments such as asthma, tuberculosis, pleurisy and bronchitis.

Corrects bad breathing habits: We have already mentioned this factor elsewhere. Most people do not use their abdomen when they breathe. Bhastrika is a means of retraining the nerve reflexes of the body so that one uses the abdominal muscles more during normal respiration throughout the day. Deeper breathing means that the body induces abundant amounts of oxygen with minimum number of breaths. This means that the body cells obtain adequate nutrition in the form of oxygen with minimum energy expenditure. The result is better overall health¹⁰.

Speeds up the blood circulation: This allows the organs, muscles, nerves, etc. of the body to function more efficiently.

Improves digestion by giving a vigorous massage to the digestive organs. This too leads to better all round health.

Removes physical impurities by increasing the metabolic rate and increasing blood circulation. Bhastrika is therefore a first rate technique for purifying the blood, improving skin complexion and removing boils, pimples, etc.

Increases the flow of prana throughout the whole pranic body, which helps to induce good health and also to remove disease at more subtle levels. The pranic body is recharged.

Makes the mind calm and one-pointed preparing the body-mind for meditation.

Generally, we can say that bhastrika supercharges the entire physical-panic-mental body. One's whole being becomes very sensitive – one becomes more receptive to higher and more subtle vibrations. Such is the utility of bhastrika pranayama.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 6

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 4

⁴ For details on nadi shodhana refer to Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 4.

⁵ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 2

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁷ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁸ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

¹⁰For more details on the process of breathing refer to Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 4.

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 2)

In a distant land there once lived a landlord who had been blessed with much good fortune. He was very wealthy and possessed many lands and fine houses and servants who waited on his every waking moment. He was fond of entertaining and used to throw lavish banquets to which came people of great distinction. His wife and children were charming and beautiful and adored him. He particularly liked to take excursions in a magnificent carriage drawn by six horses, waving and smiling to the people who called out 'My lord, my lord' as he drove past. Once he generously donated funds so that a new court house building could be built in the nearby town, and when it was finished he had a large portrait of himself hung in the foyer. Everyone told him what a fine fellow he was and he secretly agreed with them.

Then one day a terrible drought came upon the land. Many people were dying of starvation but still the landlord lived in his accustomed style. Like everyone else his crops failed, but he sold some houses and property to pay the expenses. As funds became short, parties became too expensive and his friends deserted him. His brothers started court proceedings to prevent him selling more property but he hired expensive lawyers to fight them; still he refused to accept his new situation. "So long as I am lord," he told himself, "I shall live like one." Soon he had to sell his fine carriage and was reduced to driving around in a horse and cart, his once fine clothes now dirty and torn, and although people still called him 'lord' to his face they laughed at him behind his back. Eventually he had to sell all his property to pay for court costs. His wife and children became seriously ill and, because he could not buy them medicine, died. Broken with grief and unable to even buy food, the once great landlord was reduced to begging from door to door. One day he was outside the town Court House and some people were looking at a painting in the foyer. When he went up

and told them that the portrait was of himself they just laughed and called him a 'crazy old beggar'. When he still insisted, "It's me, it's me," they became very angry and drove him away. Sore and weeping he dragged himself home.

His misfortune was to go from one extreme of wealth, status and family, to another of poverty, wretchedness and loneliness. Most of us have not experienced these extremes but we still have a lot in common with him. Like many of us he was proud of his social position and vain about his clothes and appearance, he liked to be flattered and he preferred to drive in first class transport. He was also a good family man and had many friends, and gave generously to community projects. Above all else he was determined to have a good time, even when this brought suffering to his family and eventually led to his own downfall.

This man enjoyed the good life that many of us would like, but it was a shallow one. His life was completely externalized and he had no inner experience or knowledge to draw upon when fortune turned against him. Antar mouna is one way of awakening inner knowledge in the court house of our mind. It gives us a steady reference point in a fickle world, an inner understanding that makes us into a spiritual 'lord' despite the circumstances of our life, whether rich or poor.

It is impossible to meditate when the mind is overwhelmed by a continuous stream of thoughts. If strong thoughts and emotions are suppressed, then meditation will be impossible, for the suppressed thoughts will act as a veil between individual perception and the deeper layers of being. The only path to meditation is to exhaust persistent and tumultuous emotional thoughts from the mind. Most meditative practices help to do this; one of the most direct is antar mouna stage 2.

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 2: AWARENESS OF SPONTANEOUS THOUGHT PROCESS

Antar mouna stage 1 is concerned with stimuli and experiences which come from outside; antar mouna stage 2 is concerned with those experiences, thoughts, memories, visions and emotions which arise from inside the mind¹.

Purpose

The purpose of this stage is to exhaust negative thoughts, complexes, phobias, etc. from the subconscious mind. In Sanskrit these thoughts are called *samskaras*.

Throughout life we tend to allow good thoughts to arise to conscious perception, but try to suppress bad thoughts. If a pleasant thought arises we accept and enjoy it and perhaps even dwell on it. On the other hand, if an unpleasant, nasty thought arises we tend to quickly push it back into the subconscious layers of the mind. This is called suppression and each suppressed thought remains unexpressed and emotionally charged; it acts as a block in the mind.

In life we build up a vast accumulation of suppressed thoughts. They cause unhappiness and tension in life. They keep the mind in a continual state of disturbance. They tend to cause states of depression and dissatisfaction without any obvious reason, yet the reason is almost certainly to be found in the form of suppressed thoughts. The purpose of antar mouna stage 2 is to slowly exhaust these thoughts, to purge the mind. It is a process of mental *shankhprakashana*.

The process

Antar mouna stage 2 is concerned with passive awareness of the thinking process. One should allow all thoughts to arise in the mind without suppression. Some thoughts may be disagreeable and repulsive, but don't reject them. Even if you have thoughts of murder, revenge, jealousy, hatred, etc. you should not suppress them. Allow all thoughts to bubble up without exception.

Do not make any effort to create thoughts. Let them arise naturally . . . and disappear naturally. It is not necessary to try to think, only let the thoughts arise spontaneously. Simultaneously you should try to be a witness of the thinking. You should try to remain a

disinterested spectator of everything that occurs in your mind.

You may experience periods of time where the mind seems blank, thoughts stop. It is unlikely that you are in *samadhi*. This period of blankness means that you have habitually fastened down the lid of the mind so tightly that thoughts cannot arise freely. That is, strong suppression prevents thoughts arising. Merely watch the mind and thoughts will soon start to arise again. Do not try to create thoughts during these periods of blankness. Only wait for the spontaneous flow of thoughts to start again.

After regular practice over a period of time you may start to see thoughts that you did not think existed in your mind. You may relive childhood memories. Thoughts will arise which you tried hard to forget. Fears may show themselves very vividly: fear of snakes, spiders, mice, fear of drowning, fear of the dark and so many other mental phobias. Whatever arises, try to remain an impassive witness.

As you begin to perceive deeper parts of the subconscious mind you may see visions – they may be beautiful or they may be grotesque and frightening. These are the more subtle forms of thoughts. Let them arise without suppression. Merely observe them without like or dislike. These visions must also be exhausted for they too are part of the veil of the subconscious mind.

Regular practice of antar mouna stage 2 will gradually purge the mind of suppressed thoughts. Eventually it can lead to a state of mental tranquillity and one-pointedness.

Preparation

You should first of all practise stage 1 for a period of time in order to become indifferent to external distractions. We suggest that you practise stage 1 for at least one month¹.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Close your eyes. Relax your whole body.

Practise antar mouna stage 1; that is, become aware of external sounds¹.

Then after a few minutes proceed to stage 2. Switch your whole attention to the thought process of the mind; forget the outer world. Do not choose any thoughts; let them arise spontaneously.

Let all thoughts arise freely without the slightest restriction.

Do not choose pleasant thoughts in preference to unpleasant thoughts – accept whatever comes.

Some thoughts may follow a pattern, others may arise which have no obvious relationship with the previous thoughts.

You may think about work, you may think about food, you may think about an enemy, or you may wish you could go back to sleep.

No external stimuli is required for these thoughts; they are arising from the superficial or deeper layers of the subconscious.

Remain alert and vigilant throughout.

Be aware; merely observe the thoughts as though they are occurring outside yourself.

Continually remind yourself that these thoughts are separate from yourself.

Say to yourself periodically: "I am different from these thoughts."

Every now and again ask yourself: "Am I aware of these thoughts?"

Do not control any thought; only watch them. Allow your mind to think anything that it wishes; do not interfere.

Only be a witness; try to be a detached, uninfluenced observer of all thoughts.

Sometimes the thoughts will be pleasurable – sometimes undesirable – sometimes they flow like a mighty river . . .

Sometimes there will be suppression of thoughts . . .

Only observe.

Do not oppose any thought.

Allow all emotions such as hatred, fear, guilt and so forth to arise without resistance.

Release all these pent-up emotions.

But try to remain a witness, a seer, separate from emotions and thoughts.

Be alert and in time the suppressed parts of your personality will show themselves to you.

Combine alertness with freedom of thought.

Release all the bottled up feelings and thoughts that have caused you so much pain and suffering in the past – let them arise and evaporate.

Open up the door of your subconscious mind.

Look inside and remove all the useless mental debris that is accumulated there.

Go on watching your thoughts . . .

Then after 5 minutes or so become aware of the chidakasha, the mind screen in front of your closed eyes.

This is the screen of your mind on which it is possible to see subconscious visions.

Watch the screen very carefully.

Do not create anything or expect anything.

Only watch.

If visions arise, merely observe them as a witness.

If no visions arise do not worry . . . only continue to watch the mind screen with alertness but no expectation.

After a few minutes, continue awareness of the thought process.

Watch all the thoughts arising . . . unstimulated, from the subconscious.

After some time again return to perception of the chidakasha.

Do not be tense . . . merely watch.

Whether visions arise or not, do not worry, only watch.

Then again return to detached observation of the thought process.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available

This is antar mouna stage 2.

Awareness

We have already mentioned the importance of awareness, but because this attitude is so important we will again emphasize it. Try not to identify with thoughts . . . try to remain a witness. Try to imagine that you are watching television: the thoughts and visions are the program and you are the viewer. This attitude is essential in order to gain the fullest benefits from the practice.

In the beginning you will definitely identify with the thoughts. You will become absent-minded and entangled in them. Then a few seconds or minutes later you will realize with a sudden jolt that you were totally absorbed and caught in the net of thoughts. You will know that you lost awareness. Do not worry, for this tendency to become lost in thoughts and identify with them is part of human conditioning since birth. All you must do is to be more alert. Try to maintain the attitude of a witness . . . be aware.

Readiness for stage 3

Total exhaustion of negative thoughts and emotions is impossible. Therefore, the second stage must be left at an earlier point even though it is not really completed. You should

proceed to stage 3² when you start to become overwhelmed by psychic visions. If you do not experience visions, then proceed to stage 3 when you have spent a month or so practising stage 2.

Thought awareness twenty-four hours a day

The method that we have described can be practised as part of your daily yogic practice program. However, we suggest that you try to practise spontaneous thought awareness twenty-four hours a day. You should always try to be aware, a witness of your thoughts. Allow them to arise and then dissipate into nothing, like vapour. This prevents the build-up of emotions and also releases those tensions, gross and subtle, that you have already accumulated. If you are sincerely seeking meaning and a deeper knowledge of life, we strongly urge you to start practising thought awareness on a more permanent basis. Do not suppress thoughts, for suppression has been your method of avoiding unpleasant thoughts and experiences since birth. These mental suppressions act as a fog that dulls the mind; they act as a smoke screen preventing perception of the deeper aspects of one's being. They prevent the subtle perception that is absolutely necessary in the higher stages of yoga. Let the thoughts bubble up, empty the mind of its impurities and remove the veil that prevents intuitive knowledge.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5

² Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

This lesson is concerned almost entirely with descriptions of yogic practices as follows:

Pawan sanchalana, the fourth practice of kriya yoga. This is quite a long practice taking about 25 minutes. The total duration of your kriya practice will now be about three quarters of an hour.

Antar mouna stage 2, which is concerned with awareness of spontaneous thoughts. Try to practise this technique throughout the whole day. It is an excellent method of cleaning out the mind.

Bhastrika pranayama is an excellent preparation for kriya yoga practice since it heightens the sensitivity of the mind and induces one-pointedness. It also charges one's whole being with prana through the nadis.

Pada hastasana can be integrated into your regular practice program and be done at almost any time during the day.

We suggest you change your program as follows.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	8
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	4
Pada Hastasana	5
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sirshasana	5
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	3
Bhastrika Pranayama	17
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Antar Mouna – Stage 2	20
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sirshasana	3
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Bhastrika Pranayama	9
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Antar Mouna – Stage 2	10
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
	64

In this last program we have added 4 extra minutes in order to give an integral practice program.

Lesson 28

Day after day the creatures die, yet those alive seek eternal life.

Even as a frog well within the mouth of a serpent flings to catch a fly, likewise all of us lying within the jaws of death seek enjoyment in sensual pleasure.

—*Mahabharata*

Jnana Yoga

Jnana yoga is usually defined as the path of knowledge, the Sanskrit word *jnana* meaning 'knowledge'. However, jnana does not mean intellectual or logically deductive knowledge; it means intuitive, illuminative knowledge. Jnana yoga is the method of union through intuitive flashes. The truth is realized through insight. Jnana is the result. The path of jnana yoga can be defined as the path of enquiry. From intense enquiry comes intuitive knowledge – jnana.

It is often said that jnana yoga is the most difficult path but this is not really true. It is only difficult if it does not suit your personality. If it suits you then it comes naturally – you will take to it like a fish to water. Certainly it is true that jnana yoga is the path for the few, for it requires strong willpower and the overwhelming need to find an answer. A person has to lose and absorb himself completely in his enquiry in order to obtain the required results and answers. Most people have so many distractions that they cannot engross themselves completely in the enquiry. Jnana yoga requires obstinacy . . . in fact, an obsession to find out answers. If you have this obsessive need for answers then jnana yoga will come spontaneously.

Jnana yoga requires that you throw out all concepts, dogmas, ideas that you don't know to be true from personal experience. Throw them out . . . believe nothing. Of course, this does not apply to all things. If someone tells you that a scorpion will bite you, then believe them. There is no need to test their statement through personal experience. Accept this type of idea for it is not of great significance in your life. Whether the statement is true or untrue is not really so important, unless it bites you of course and then it will be too late. If someone tells you that the food which you eat is digested in a long fleshy tube called the intestines and also shows you a diagram to confirm the statement, then accept it. You

need not dissect a human body yourself to find out – thousands of other people have already done so. Accept this fact and accept numerous other statements that are part of everyday life. If someone tells you that certain plants are poisonous, why test them? Accept the fact – it makes life easier. Most things in life have to be accepted on face value.

But if someone tells you that you are divine, that there is something more than body and individual mind or that there is such a thing as mystical experience, why believe them? In fact, the path of jnana yoga says that you have to reject all these concepts unless you have experience to the contrary. All concepts of God, deities, etc. have to be thrown out. This is the starting point of jnana yoga: ACCEPT NOT, BELIEVE NOT. The path of bhakti is different; it tells you to believe and if this belief is strong enough then it will take you to a point beyond belief. Jnana yoga will take you to the same knowledge that is beyond blind acceptance and belief. The two paths are different, but they lead to the same realization and knowledge.

To tread the path of jnana yoga one must be ruthless. This is why it is regarded as a difficult path. It is not easy to believe in nothing. It is not easy to empty the mind of preconceived ideas and dogmas. It is far easier to believe in something, even though the belief may be superficial or even erroneous. Jnana yoga can therefore be practised only by those people with unflinching determination.

Jnana yoga says that if you believe something without personal experience then, in fact, you are autosuggesting the answer to yourself. You are indoctrinating yourself and if you think about this you will agree that it is true. Even in the case of the intestines, your knowledge is really autosuggestion. You do not really know the shape and size of the intestines unless you open up a human body. You accept the description given in books or by

physiologists because it is convenient; actually you indoctrinate yourself. But as we have already mentioned, this general acceptance of many things in life is absolutely necessary. We cannot spend all our lives testing and investigating everything; the world would be a graveyard if everyone wanted to personally test if a plant is poisonous or not, or there would be total chaos if every person went to Timbuktu to see if such a place really exists. We have to learn about most things from the words of other people and their personal experience. But this is not the case with investigations into reality. Those who wish to tread the path of jnana yoga should not accept other people's words, dogmas and preachings on this subject. If you do then you are indoctrinating yourself. You are autosuggesting an answer to yourself without personal experience. And without the overwhelming proof of personal experience no change will occur in your life. Superficial answers will not illuminate your existence. They merely act as a verbal intellectual tag onto which you precariously grasp, but your deeper being is not fooled. In the core of your heart you will know that you are deluding yourself. Deep down you will know that you have blindly adopted and accepted another 'ism'. Your lifestyle will not be changed and you will not be any happier or wiser.

If you wish to follow the path of jnana yoga you should believe nothing. Throw out all beliefs. It was Christ who said: "Empty thyself and I shall fill thee."

The Zen master Chao-chu was asked: "What would you say to someone who came to you with nothing?" He replied: "Throw it away".

It is reputed that Lao-tse said: "Scholars gain every day (useless, non-experienced knowledge), but Taoists (sages) lose every day (the accumulation of useless non-experienced dogmas and knowledge)".

This is the beginning of jnana yoga. Reject all concepts.

From the starting point of non-acceptance of ideologies, a person on the path of jnana yoga must start to enquire. One of the most well known enquiries is: "Who am I?" This is the method that Ramana Maharshi suggested. If you answer the question with "I am John Smith," then you have not even started on the path of jnana yoga. You still have not emptied the mind of trivial, insignificant, superficial

and logical answers. Your name is only a label to differentiate you socially from your neighbour who is perhaps called Fred Smith. Your name is not you – it is merely a means to an end which allows your mail to reach you and for you to receive the correct pay packet. It is your marker, your label – it is not your identity. Your name is not you.

To make progress in jnana yoga you have to throw out all definitions about your existence. You must be overwhelmed by the feeling that you do not know who you are. If you merely ask the question "Who am I?" from your lips, if you do not ask the question with intensity and the overwhelming need to know, then nothing will happen. If you ask the question like a parrot then the implications of the enquiry will not penetrate the deeper layers of your being. This is why jnana yoga is difficult for most people; few people can become completely obsessed and filled with enquiry into their own nature.

Ramana Maharshi was a jnana yogi. He asked himself the question "Who am I?" He did not merely ask the question for five minutes every morning before breakfast. His whole being vibrated with the enquiry twenty-four hours a day, whether awake or asleep. The enquiry invaded and permeated his deeper being. The enquiry continued constantly, whether consciously or unconsciously. The question continued whether he was walking, sitting or talking. His whole being tackled the enquiry. His whole being was poised on the edge of a precipice. And the result? He realized his real nature. He became self-realized. This is the path of jnana yoga. It requires that a person has such a personality that he tenaciously clings to the enquiry and desperately needs to know the answer . . . as though everything depends on the answer. And in fact it does.

It is not necessary to pose the question "Who am I?" Any question can be asked but it must be a question for which you desperately seek an answer. Actually, if you are really ready for the path of jnana yoga, then you probably don't need to pose the question. The question will already be there. It will be nagging at you from under the surface of your mind. If you have to sit down and ask yourself: 'What will be the question that I will ask myself?' then jnana yoga is not your path. At the present

time if you have to sit down and try to think of a question, then it means that there is no question that sufficiently obsesses you, and that you do not deeply and seriously question the nature of your being and existence. If you have a question that haunts you day and night, then that question will be your vehicle in jnana yoga.

A few minutes thought will convince you that jnana yoga is the method of scientific discovery, artistic creation and musical inspiration. Of course, it is not known as jnana yoga, but the process is basically the same. All scientific discoveries, all artistic and musical creations have one thing in common: they have defied logic. They have arisen because of intuitive flashes. The perception of a scientific law or a piece of music occurred suddenly – it happened like a thunderclap. The scientist, musician or artist suddenly saw something that was not defined by the existing arena of accepted and documented knowledge. No scientific discoveries or works of art have ever been worked out using the laws of logic or the intellect. The intellect comes subsequently when flashes are rationalized in order to fit the new knowledge into current patterns of thought of the rational world.

The sum total of knowledge, known and unknown, can be compared very roughly, and not very correctly, to a large field (let us assume for the sake of the analogy that knowledge is finite). The surface and earth of this field represent the sum total of knowledge. In the field there are various holes – some big, some small. These represent knowledge that is currently known. The size of the hole represents the amount that is known about that particular subject. It is logic and rational thinking that enlarges each hole, using the 'intuitive' knowledge as its basis. In other words, the hole was perhaps started by a certain scientist who intuited some knowledge about a specific phenomenon. By technology, applied science, etc. the hole is enlarged. The method of logic does not dig new holes, it merely enlarges existing holes. There are large parts of the field that contain no holes. This is 'unknown knowledge'. The only way for this knowledge to be known is for new holes to be dug. The method is intuitive flashes. It is intuition that creates new avenues of knowledge. It is logic that enlarges these

avenues and applies the knowledge in the world for constructive (and destructive) purposes.

We have tried to explain the essential part that intuition plays in the world of science and arts. Now we pose the question: 'How did these discoverers, inventors, composers and artists receive their creative flashes?' The answer is simple: they allowed some question or thought to obsess them night and day. Einstein did not discover the laws of relativity without effort. He was obsessed by the mystery of time and space. His whole being was immersed in the problem. The intuitive answer that he realized was total . . . not only half an answer. He saw everything. How can something become infinitely heavy at the speed of light and at the same time have no length; how can the speed of the observer and source have no influence on the speed of light? And so on. The answer that he received defied logic and currently accepted science. He spent the rest of his life trying to put his intuited knowledge on paper and trying to fit it into a logically understandable system. The important thing to note is that the answer did not come from rational thinking. Had Einstein been attached to logical reasoning then he would still be trying to find the answer to the relationship between time and space. He would not have formulated the theory of relativity, and certainly it would not be part of present day science. This is the method of jnana yoga applied in the field of science. There are other obvious examples of people who applied the method of Jnana yoga in this field. Leonardo da Vinci is a good example of a person who applied Jnana yoga in the phenomenal world. Michaelangelo is an example of a genius who received intuitive inspiration in the field of sculpture. All great musical composers followed the path of jnana; they have expressed and created their music after receiving illuminative experience. They were all on the path of jnana. But since they had probably never heard of the system of yoga, they did not classify themselves as jnanis.

The foundation of jnana yoga is that one should know and feel the limitations of intellectual thought. This feeling should come from the very depths of one's heart. When you know and accept the severe

limitations of the intellect, then you are ready to start the path of jnana yoga. If you believe that deep and meaningful answers can be obtained from intellectual thought and discussion then you are not yet ready to tread the path of jnana yoga. Sri Aurobindo explained this as follows: "The capital period in my intellectual life was when I could clearly see that what the intellect said might be correct or not correct, that what the intellect justifies was true and that the opposite was also true. I never admitted truth in my mind without simultaneously keeping it open to the contrary of it . . . and the result was that the prestige of the intellect was gone."

Even modern science seems to be heading more and more in this direction. We are informed that atomic physics can only explain the behaviour of atomic particles by postulating the simultaneous action of contradictory laws. That is, laws that are logically opposite are used to define the observed phenomena of atomic particles. We are also informed that two logically contradictory laws are used to explain the behaviour of light. The world we live in is much stranger than the dictates of logic. Therefore, to tread the path of jnana yoga one should not take logical thought too seriously. You should feel the inadequacy of the intellect. This does not mean discarding the laws of social living and doing crazy things. No, it merely means that you should take all intellectual speculations and all logical games with a 'pinch of salt'. Understand clearly that logical thought is a means to an end, nothing more; it is a tool that makes life easier and more organized. Without logical rules and laws of conduct then the world would erupt in a state of chaos. Rational thought is a necessary tool. But it cannot bring meaningful answers and deep knowledge in life.

Jnana is the path of intense reflection. This reflection leads to intuitive knowledge. Nothing must be taken for granted. Discard and reject all preconceived dogmas. Ask yourself questions such as 'What is this thing called I?' 'What is consciousness?' 'Is there any truth in the atma that is mentioned by so many sages? No, impossible. Why should I believe?' Throw out everything that is not based on personal perception. All you have to do is to continually enquire.

The guru helps the disciple on the path of jnana even when the disciple does not know that he is treading the path of jnana. The guru can pose a question, or he may say something that seems completely contradictory to the disciple. The guru may pose the question directly or indirectly; perhaps the disciple will hear a passing comment, but this leaves a lasting impression. Something within the disciple stirs. The mind is put in a state of crisis. The disciple becomes completely absorbed in trying to solve or come to grips with the problem. Deeper forces come into play in order to try to resolve the conflict. He starts to contemplate on the problem. He becomes totally absorbed, subconsciously and consciously, trying to solve the dilemma. The mind is tuned up; it becomes supercharged and one-pointed. The mind that was previously diverted here and there and engrossed in trivial thoughts becomes completely engulfed in the enquiry. This enquiry need not always be on a conscious level. All the different levels of one's being are brought into play in order to battle with the enquiry. The whole mind flows in one current. The seed has been planted – all forces are consolidated to bring about fruition. The mind is normally like a river with many currents; it wanders here and there without any real force. Then the lock gates are opened . . . the currents are swept away. The river flows with one mighty unified force. The enquiry opens up the blocks of the mind. The dammed up mind is released; it becomes receptive to the influx of intuition. Higher truth is revealed in intuitive flashes passing through the medium of a concentrated yet relaxed mind. This is jnana.

The question will be asked: 'Is jnana yoga for me?' Only you can decide, or your guru. But certainly jnana yoga is for the few; it is a path that is fraught with pitfalls, the greatest of which is that it can so easily degenerate into mere intellectualization. This happens very often; people are so habituated to intellectual thinking that they automatically start to think of intellectual answers to their enquiry. Instead of removing concepts they start to fill their heads with them. They lack the intensity of purpose. The enquiry does not have the intensity to penetrate the deeper realms of being to find a solution. The result is that they resort to intellectual explanations.

There are many people who have reached what they feel are relevant answers through mere word juggling. They talk endlessly about God, consciousness, divine beings and so on, but it is all speculation and words. There is absolutely no basis in personal experience. They are replacing experience with mere words. This is definitely not the aim nor the path of jnana yoga. This is where jnana yoga becomes corrupted. The aim is to wipe out superficial, intellectual speculations, not create them. The aim is to empty the mind of concepts, not fill it up. The person on the path of jnana yoga has to persevere with the enquiry without giving up or accepting secondhand speculations. You must wait for illuminative experience, which is firsthand experience. When this happens there will be no doubt about its validity.

It is impossible to follow only the path of jnana yoga, nor is it desirable. Each person is composed of different aspects, some of which may be more prominent than others. For example, some people are very active; others are more thoughtful; some are prominently devotional. All of these aspects need to be channelled into a unifying force. The follower of jnana yoga is likely to be the thoughtful type with strong willpower. However, this does not mean that he sits and thinks all day. He should also do physical karma yoga and perhaps some asanas, pranayama and meditation practices. This will bring about an overall harmony, which will help him to make more progress on the path of jnana yoga.

If you think you are ready to tread the path of jnana yoga, then begin right now. But remember, it is only for those people who have a one-pointed mind. Anxieties, phobias, neuroses and other mental disturbances prevent intuition. They act as impediments. If your mind is continuously oscillating and distracted then you cannot fill yourself with the enquiry, it will lack sufficient depth to induce intuitive understanding. Under these circumstances, we suggest that you practise other forms of yoga to make the mind more harmonized and concentrated, in order to prepare you for future practise of jnana yoga.

Let us summarize: if you wish to follow the path of jnana yoga then you must believe and accept nothing unless it is based on personal experience, not the experience of others. You should not blindly accept answers that have

been given by sages, saints, thinkers and books. You must find out the answers for yourself; while cleaning the mind of conceptual debris you should fill it up with an intense enquiry into your own nature. You should pursue your enquiry through thick and thin until you realize the answer. This is the path of jnana yoga.

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 5: SHABDA SANCHALANA (ROTATION OF WORD CONSCIOUSNESS)

The Sanskrit word *shabda* means 'word'; *sanchalana* means 'rotation' or 'conduction'. Therefore, this practice can be called 'the rotation (or conduction) of word consciousness'. Here the word is the mantra Soham. Shabda sanchalana can also be regarded as the sixth stage of ajapa japa¹.

The implications of Soham

Soham is widely called the *ajapa gayatri* – the spontaneous song of the breath. It is a mantra that arises automatically with each and every breath. It is the sound that corresponds with the natural rhythm of breathing. It is the mantra that every person chants continuously, whether knowingly or unknowingly.

In all yoga practices awareness must be fixed on something. There has to be a focal point that settles the fluctuations of the mind and makes it one-pointed. Anything can be used: a mantra, a mental picture of a deity or even your big toe. But it should be something that automatically attracts your attention and brings about continuous remembrance. This sounds easy but is not. The mind resists the process of concentration and starts to wander. The symbol is quickly forgotten and one becomes lost again in the stream of bubbling thoughts. *Soham* is an ideal mantra because it is always being chanted independent of the state of mind. It will only stop if you stop breathing. Therefore, *Soham* reminds you to be aware.

Any mantra can be integrated with the breath to produce continuous remembrance, but *Soham* arises naturally, which makes it easier. It has also been tested by numerous yogis for thousands of years. We highly recommend it (and the mantra Aum) for all sincere sadhakas. Constant remembrance will lead to dhyana.

Soham also has a literal meaning. It means: "I am Shiva (pure consciousness)" or "I am

He (pure consciousness)". It indicates the union of Shiva and Shakti, the merging of the individual with the cosmic or supreme consciousness. However, the reader should not worry too much about the meaning, unless he or she has had a deep transcendental experience. Any attempt to understand the meaning of *Soham* logically will lead to delusion. It can only be understood at an intuitive level. When a person understands its transcendental meaning, and only then, can it be used as a means of constant affirmation and remembrance. This will maintain a steady flow of dhyana.

If you wish and if your mind is sufficiently one-pointed, you can enquire further into the deep and real meaning of *Soham*. This is a method of jnana yoga. But it will not yield results if your mind is tense and full of problems and unless you enquire incessantly, whether consciously or unconsciously twenty-four hours a day. If your mind is ready and your aspiration intense then there will be a transcendental explosion of the meaning of *Soham*. The meaning will show itself like a flash of lightning, but you have to be ready. Few people are prepared for this type of jnana yoga practice. Generally, therefore, we recommend remembrance of *Soham* as the best sadhana.

In shabda sanchalana do not worry about the meaning of *Soham*. Only be aware of the sound synchronized with the breath.

Pronunciation of Soham

Some people hear the sound *Saham* when they listen to their breath instead of *Soham*. This is perfectly acceptable and can be used in shabda sanchalana instead of *Soham*.

Soham should be integrated with the breathing. With the practice of ujjayi pranayama the sound can be heard very distinctly. Try it. You should hear: *So* with inhalation, *Ham* with exhalation.

In shabda sanchalana you should hear so as you breathe in from mooladhara up the frontal arohan psychic passage to bindu. The sound should be prolonged.

That is, from mooladhara to swadhisthana kshetram the emphasis will be on the sound: s-s-s-s. From swadhisthana to bindu the emphasis should be on the sound: o-o-o-o. This is clearly shown in the diagram.

You should hear the sound *Ham* as you breathe out and down the spinal awarohan psychic passage from bindu to mooladhara. From bindu through ajna to vishuddhi, the emphasis will be on the sound: h-a-a-a. From vishuddhi to mooladhara the emphasis should be on the sound: m-m-m. This will be a humming sound that vibrates down the spine.

The sound *Soham* should not be pronounced aloud. It is the natural sound of the breath. The sound should be such that you can hear it very distinctly, but other people cannot unless they put their ear very close to you.

Sitting position

Remain in the same sitting pose that was used for pawan sanchalana, the previous kriya². Only move and adjust your position if you feel any pain and stiffness in your body.

The traditional sitting poses are padmasana or siddhasana (siddha yoni asana for women). If these asanas are not comfortable then you can use any other comfortable sitting pose such as ardha padmasana, swastikasana, etc.³

Keep your back straight throughout the entire practice; the only part of the body that should be moved is the head.

Psychic passage awareness

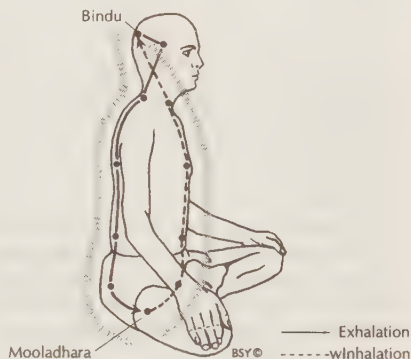
As you breathe in with *So* your awareness should ascend the frontal arohan passage. After leaving mooladhara chakra you should feel the mantra and breath piercing swadhisthana, manipura, anahata and vishuddhi kshetrams and then finally bindu.

As you breathe out with *Ham* your awareness should descend the spinal awarohan passage. After leaving bindu, feel the mantra and breath progressively piercing ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and finally, the mooladhara chakra.

There should be no mental repetition of the names of the kshetram and chakras . . . only awareness.

Subsidiary practices

You should practise ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra and unmani mudra during shabda sanchalana. These were also used in pawan sanchalana².



Technique

You should practise shabda sanchalana directly after finishing pawan sanchalana.

Sit comfortably. Hold the back straight.

Open your eyes.

Do khechari mudra; this should continue throughout the whole practice.

Exhale deeply.

Bend your head forwards.

Become aware of the mooladhara chakra.

The first round starts here.

With ujjayi pranayama, breathe in and up the arohan passage.

Hear the sound *So* and feel it piercing each kshetram in turn.

When your awareness travels between the vishuddhi kshetram and bindu slowly raise your head.

Your head should be upright when your awareness reaches bindu.

The *So* mantra and inhalation should end when your awareness reaches bindu.

Be aware of the bindu for a few seconds.

Then breathe out with ujjayi down the awarohan passage in the spine.

Start with unmani mudra.

Hear the mantra *Ham* and feel it piercing the chakras in turn. No mental repetition of the chakra names . . . only awareness.

Your exhalation and the *Ham* mantra should finish when your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Bend your head forwards.
Open your eyes again.
Maintain awareness of the mooladhara for a few seconds.
This is the end of the first round.
The process is shown in the accompanying picture.
Now start the second round.
With ujjayi inhale up the arohan with awareness of the sound So and the kshetram.
Do 59 rounds.
Then proceed to maha mudra⁴.

Breathing

Ujjayi throughout. Hold the breath for a few seconds at mooladhara. Inhale while ascending the arohan passage. Hold the breath for a few seconds with awareness at bindu. Exhale while descending the awarohan passage.

Mental turmoil

If your mind is disturbed let the Soham be quite loud and the breathing faster.

If the mind is relaxed and reasonably one-pointed then let the Soham sound be more subtle and the breathing slower.

Awareness

Maintain awareness of the mantra Soham, breathing and the psychic passages.

Sequence

Shabda sanchalana should be done directly after pawan sanchalana² and before maha mudra⁴.

Duration

You should practise 59 rounds. This will take between 25 and 40 minutes depending on the speed of respiration.

Counting of rounds

In our description of pawan sanchalana we advised you to use a 108 bead mala and tie a knot after the forty-ninth bead. For this practice there is no need to tie another knot. After completing pawan sanchalana your fingers will be at the forty-ninth bead. Merely continue the process of rotating one bead at the end of each round of shabda sanchalana (when your awareness reaches mooladhara). When your fingers reach the sumeru bead then you will have completed 59 rounds ($49 + 59 = 108$).

Notes

¹ Ajapa Japa: Stage 1; Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5

² Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁴ Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 1

Hatha Yoga: Nauli (Stage 1)

Nauli is one of the six main groups of shatkarmas or cleansing techniques, three of which have already been described¹. Most of the practices of dhauti have already been explained as well as jala neti, sutra neti and trataka². In this topic we propose to explain the first part of nauli³.

General information

Nauli is a yogic technique of massaging the entire abdomen and stomach by contracting and rolling the abdominal muscles (specifically the rectus abdominii). It is very beneficial for the health of the digestive system and in fact the health of the whole body. Of all yogic practices, nauli gives the most profound massage of the inner organs. It is quite difficult for beginners but with determination and regular practice it can be done by almost everyone.

Definition

The Sanskrit word nauli comes from the root word *nala* or *nali*, which means: a tubular vessel, vein or nerve of the body; a reed or hollow stalk (perhaps of a lotus). The word *nala* is also Sanskrit for the rectus abdominii muscles (in the Monier Williams Sanskrit Dictionary it is literally defined as the 'navel string'). The rectus abdominii are the two muscles which act as pillars supporting the abdominal organs between the pelvic region and the chest. Thus *nauli* is the technique that is concerned with manipulation of the rectus abdominii muscles.

It is also interesting to note that the Sanskrit word *nau* means 'ship'. When nauli is perfected then the abdominal muscles seem to flow like the rolling waves of the ocean. The muscles create the same wave-like motion produced by a ship gliding through the water.

Nauli is also called *lauliki karma*. The word *lauliki* is derived from the root word *lola* which means 'to move hither and thither', 'rolling and agitation'. And this is exactly what the

technique of lauliki (or nauli) does. It rolls, rotates and agitates the entire abdomen and associated muscles and nerves. The word karma here means 'process or technique'. Thus lauliki karma is the technique of rotating the abdominal muscles and stirring up the inner organs.

Scriptural references

Nauli is mentioned in various yogic scriptures but with little detail. In the *Gheranda Samhita* it says: "Vigorously rotate the abdomen from side to side. This practice eliminates all types of disease and increases the digestive fire." (v. 1:53) Nothing more is explained. From the description given it is completely impossible for a beginner to learn and practise nauli. Personal guidance is necessary. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "Bending the shoulders forwards, the abdomen should be rotated from right to left and then left to right. This practice is called nauli by yogis. Nauli removes abdominal ailments, increases the digestive fire and brings happiness. This is the greatest practice of hatha yoga." (v. 11:33, 34) Again the description is valid, but too brief for learning nauli. These short verses in the scriptures are intended more as a method of remembrance than as instruction. Instructions had to be learned directly from the guru.

Rectus abdominii

In nauli various muscles are used in the abdomen, back, legs, arms, etc. However, the practice is primarily concerned with contraction of the rectus abdominii muscles. These are two long vertical muscles located in front of the abdomen. The top ends are fixed under the centre of the ribcage near the diaphragm and the bottom ends are fixed at the pubic bone just above the genital region. The two muscles are wider at the top than the bottom.

The rectus abdominii function in conjunction with other abdominal muscles. The main ones

are called the external and internal obliques and the transverse abdominii. These muscles, together with the rectus abdominii, are arranged in sheets in such a way as to give maximum strength and control. They protect the inner abdominal organs. When they are insufficient then hernia can result. These muscles also contract and massage the internal organs and aid one another in the process of micturition (passing of urine), defecation, vomiting and also childbirth in women.

It is these muscles that are directly manipulated during the practice of nauli.

Preparation

Before attempting nauli you should master the practices of agnisar kriya⁴ and uddiyana bandha⁵. Without mastering these two preparatory techniques you will find nauli difficult, if not impossible.

Body position

Stand with the feet a little less than one metre apart. Bend the knees slightly.

Lean forwards.

Place the hands firmly on the thighs just above the knees.

The fingers can point inwards or outwards; choose the position that you find from experience to give the greatest contraction of the abdominal muscles during nauli.

The arms should be straight throughout the whole practice.

Bend the head forwards and gaze at the abdomen.

This position of the body is clearly illustrated.

Summary of full practice

Time and practice are required in order to master nauli. Also, one should progressively develop control over the abdominal muscles. For this reason we have divided nauli into two stages, as follows.

Stage 1: abdominal contraction

In this preliminary stage one must master the following:

1. *Madhyama nauli* where both the rectus abdominii muscles are contracted centrally.
2. *Vama nauli* where only the left rectus abdominus muscle is contracted.
3. *Dakshina nauli* where only the right rectus abdominus muscle is contracted.

These three practices are done separately one after the other. When they are perfected then one proceeds to stage 2⁵.

Stage 2: abdominal rotation

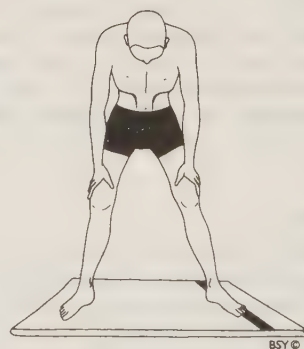
This second stage is the full form of nauli. It consists of two parts:

1. Rolling movement of the abdominal muscles from left to right.
2. Rolling movement of the abdominal muscles from right to left.

For a beginner this rolling or churning movement has to be seen to be believed. It appears as if the rectus abdominii muscles are rolling across the front of the abdomen.

In this topic we will describe stage 1 and in the following lesson, stage 2. Do not attempt stage 2 without first of all mastering stage 1⁵.

NAULI – STAGE 1 ABDOMINAL CONTRACTION



1. Madhyama nauli (central contraction)

Take the correct standing position.

Exhale deeply, emptying the lungs as much as possible.

To obtain the fullest exhalation you should contract the abdominal muscles by doing uddiyana bandha⁵.

Look at the abdomen.

Hold the breath.

Try to contract the rectus abdominii muscles so that they form a central arch running vertically in front of the abdomen.

This position is clearly shown in the figure.

Hold the contraction for as long as you are able to comfortably retain the breath.

Try to contract the muscles as much as possible, but don't strain.

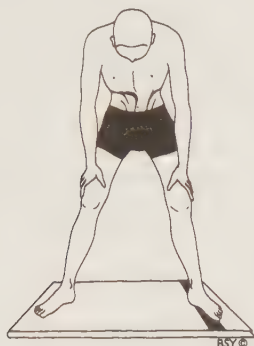
Then relax the muscular contraction so that you return to uddiyana bandha. Breathe in slowly and let the abdomen expand. Relax your whole body. This is 1 round.

Breathe normally a number of times, allowing the pulse beat to return to normal.

Then repeat the practice.

You should practise madhyama nauli until it is perfected; this may take a number of weeks, or even months.

Then proceed to vama nauli.



2. Vama nauli (left isolation)

Do not attempt vama nauli until you have mastered madhyama nauli.

Take the correct standing position.

Do madhyama nauli as described under the previous heading.

Then try to relax the muscles on the right side of the abdomen, especially the right rectus abdominus muscle.

Maintain contraction of the left side muscles; this will pull the rectus abdominii muscles to the left hand side as shown in the above figure. Contraction of only the left hand muscles is not easy for beginners.

You will find that this practice is easier if you press your straight left arm firmly against the thigh, while reducing the pressure of the right arm on the other thigh.

Also the practice becomes easier if you lean slightly forwards and towards the left side of the body. You should try this for yourself.

Contract the muscles to the left side as strongly as you can without straining.

Then return to madhyama nauli.

Relax the muscles and do uddiyana bandha.

Breathe in and let the abdomen expand.

This is 1 round.

Breathe normally a number of times until the pulse returns to normal.

Then do dakshina nauli.

3. Dakshina nauli (right isolation)

Do madhyama nauli.

Then try to relax the muscles on the left side of the abdomen, especially the left rectus abdominus muscle.

Contract the right abdominal muscles.

The rectus abdominii muscles will form an arch or a ridge on the right hand side of the abdomen.

You will find this practice easier if you lean slightly forwards and to the right side of the body, and press the right arm firmly on the right thigh while releasing the pressure of the left arm on the left thigh.

Hold the contraction as tightly as possible while retaining the breath. Do not strain.

Then return to madhyama nauli.

Relax the muscles and do uddiyana bandha.

Inhale slowly.

Breathe normally a number of times.

Let the heartbeat return to normal.

Repeat vama and dakshina nauli a number of times according to available time and energy.

Do not strain yourself by attempting to do too many rounds.

Breathing

Normal breathing in the starting position. Deep exhalation combined with uddiyana bandha before isolation of rectus abdominii muscles. Hold the breath while contracting the abdominal muscles. Controlled inhalation after releasing the muscular contraction. Normal breathing before the next round.

Successive contractions

In order to develop muscular control, beginners can if they wish successively contract and relax the muscles in the final position. That is, quickly contract and relax the abdominal muscles while retaining the breath. This applies mainly to madhyama nauli, though it can also be performed for vama and dakshina nauli.

Awareness

You should pay full attention to the control of the muscles. If you watch the muscles you will find that control becomes easier.

Time of practice

Nauli should only be practised when the stomach is empty; that is, at least five to six hours after meals. The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast.

Precautions

If you feel any pain in the abdomen during nauli you should immediately stop the practice. Try nauli the following day or when the pain subsides. If the pain persists then you should seek proper guidance from an experienced yoga teacher or doctor.

Limitations

Nauli should not be attempted by people suffering from any serious ailment such as:

- high blood pressure
- gallstones
- hernia
- peptic or duodenal ulcer

If you are in doubt seek the advice of a yoga teacher.

Pregnant women should not practise nauli. However, after childbirth we suggest the practice of nauli (under the guidance of a qualified yoga teacher) in order to strengthen the abdominal and pelvic muscles and to reshape the body and readjust the position of the inner organs.

Duration

At first you should not do too many rounds. If you are trying to master madhyama nauli then five or six rounds is more than sufficient at first. With practice you can do a maximum of about ten rounds. If you are trying to master vama and dakshina nauli then three to five rounds each is sufficient. Do not strain under any circumstances. You must pay attention to your body and stop if you feel even a little tired.

Notes

¹ For further details on the shatkarmas refer to Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Sutra neti – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 3
Trataka: stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6;
stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6; stage 3 –
Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

³ Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

⁵ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

Asanas: Practice

Here we will describe three asanas:

1. Mayurasana
2. Hamsasana
3. Padma mayurasana

These are excellent asanas for speeding up the metabolic processes in the body and for eliminating toxins. Mayurasana and padma mayurasana can be described as balancing asanas and hamsasana as a simple form of mayurasana. Beginners should first of all master hamsasana and then proceed to mayurasana. Padma mayurasana can be done by anyone who can easily sit in padmasana.

MAYURASANA (PEACOCK POSE)

This asana is a balancing asana that requires a reasonable degree of muscular strength. Most women will find it quite difficult.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *mayura* means 'peacock'. This asana is so called because its final pose resembles a peacock with full plumage. The legs represent the long tail, the forearms the peacock's legs and the hands the peacock's feet and claws.

There is also another reason for the name. A peacock has a well-known ability to absorb and destroy toxins in the things that it eats. Mayurasana is also renowned for its capacity to eliminate toxins from the body, hence its name.

Scriptural references

Mayurasana is mentioned in most of the well-known scriptures of hatha yoga. In the *Gheranda Samhita* it says: "Place your palms on the floor with the elbows on each side of the navel. Raise your whole body in the air as though it is a bundle of sticks. This is called mayurasana by yogis." (v. 2:30)

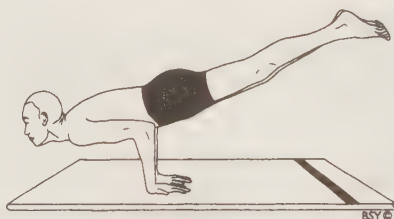
In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "Lie flat on the ground. Rest your body on the elbows

keeping both sides of the navel in contact with the elbows. Raise your whole body off the ground just like a log of wood parallel to the ground. This is called mayurasana." (v. 1:30) "Mayurasana is one of the best asanas for eliminating all types of abdominal ailments. It increases the digestive fire and eliminates the toxins consumed through faulty diet." (v. 1:31)

Little needs to be added to these quotations; they speak for themselves.

Preparation

In the final pose of mayurasana the whole weight of the body rests on the two elbows and palms. This is quite difficult for beginners since it requires muscular effort combined with balance. We suggest that beginners first of all prepare themselves by doing hamsasana and/or padma mayurasana. Chakrasana is also a good preparatory asana¹.



Technique

Kneel on the floor.

Place the two feet together.

Separate the knees.

This position is as adopted for simhasana².

Lean forward.

Place both palms on the floor between the knees; the fingers should point backwards towards the feet.

Bring the wrists and forearms together so that they touch.

Lean forward and rest the abdomen on the top of the elbows in the region just below the navel.

Let the chest rest on top of the upper arms. Stretch the legs back so that they are straight and together.

Breathe in deeply.

Tense the muscles of the body.

Slowly elevate the trunk, head and legs so that they lie in one straight, horizontal line.

Hold the head upward.

The whole body should be balanced on the palms.

Try to elevate the legs and feet higher, keeping them straight, by applying more muscular effort and by adjusting the balance of the body. This is the final pose.

Hold the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Use the fingers to maintain balance.

Do not strain.

Then slowly lower the legs to the ground.

Return to the starting pose.

This is 1 round.

Another round can be done if you have sufficient energy and when the breathing rate has returned to normal.

Caution

It is very easy to fall forward from the final pose and crush the nose on the floor. Be careful and if necessary place a small cushion under the face.

Breathing

Normal breathing in the starting pose. Deep inhalation before raising the body to the final pose. Beginners can hold their breath in the final pose for as long as is comfortable. Advanced practitioners can breathe slowly and deeply in the final pose. Breathe out after returning to the starting position. Breathe normally before attempting a second round.

Awareness

Awareness should be on balance in the final pose.

Duration

Stay in the final pose either:

1. For as long as you can hold your breath, or
2. While breathing deeply for as long as you feel no undue fatigue.

Do not strain under any circumstances. Beginners should stay only for a few seconds in the final pose, slowly increasing by a few seconds every day. Do not attempt too many

rounds. Three is about the maximum. With practice it is possible to stay in the final pose for a few minutes, but there should not be any strain.

Time of practice and sequence

Practise when the stomach is empty. Like most asanas, the best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast.

Mayurasana vigorously speeds up the blood flow. Also it tends to increase the amount of toxins in the blood as part of the process of purification, therefore do not practise mayurasana before any inverted asana, for this may direct excessive toxins towards the brain.

Mayurasana should be done at the end of your asana program.

Limitations

Mayurasana should not be practised if you suffer from any of the following ailments:

- high blood pressure
- any heart ailments
- hernia
- peptic or duodenal ulcers

Do not attempt to do mayurasana if you are even slightly ill or if you feel any physical weakness. Pregnant women are strictly advised not to practise mayurasana.

Benefits

Mayurasana is a unique asana in that it vigorously stimulates the entire body processes. It stimulates the blood circulation and the process of metabolism. It thereby helps to purify the blood and in turn the whole body. If you have a bad complexion and boils then we suggest that you try mayurasana combined with the following program:

- Stop eating highly toxic foods such as spices, meat, sweets and any synthetic, adulterated foods that are difficult to digest.
- Adopt a simple diet consisting of such items as buttermilk, fruit, vegetables, grains, etc.
- Apply your urine all over your body before a bath. Leave it on your body for about one minute before washing it off³.
- After two weeks practising the above, start to practise mayurasana every few hours, for at least a few minutes each time. If mayurasana is too difficult then do hamsasana or padma mayurasana as alternatives.

Try this program for one month. It should bring a general inner and outer purification of the entire body. It will be a great help in removing boils etc. If you see no marked improvement then extend the program for another few weeks.

In one respect, however, you have to be careful; mayurasana tends to expel impurities in the body very quickly. You may initially find that your skin complexion and boils become worse; this is merely the manifestation of inner toxins. Either persevere with your practice or reduce the number of times that you do mayurasana; you must decide. If you wish, seek expert advice.

Mayurasana massages and stimulates all the digestive organs. It is very useful for treating diabetes, constipation, flatulence, sluggishness in the liver and kidneys, etc. Mayurasana stimulates the process of waste removal from the bowels. It is a very useful asana for many types of digestive ailments and also helps to keep the digestive system in good, efficient order.

Mayurasana also helps to harmonize the glands of the endocrinal system. It strengthens the muscles of the whole body and develops muscular control along with a sense of balance.

Integration with other practices

Mayurasana is an important part of basti⁴. It is used to fully eliminate water from the bowels.

HAMSASANA (SWAN POSE)

Hamsasana is a much simpler form of mayurasana. It should be mastered before attempting mayurasana.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *hamsa* means 'swan'. We are not sure why it is called the 'swan pose', because the final pose does not immediately evoke the image of a swan in the same way that mayurasana evokes an image of a peacock.

Technique

Kneel on the floor with the feet together and the knees apart as in simhasana². Place the palms flat on the floor with the fingers pointing towards the feet. The method is exactly the same as for mayurasana except that the feet are not raised off the ground.



Hold the head upwards.

All the weight of the body should be supported on the hands and tips of the toes in the final pose.

Stay in the final pose breathing slowly and deeply. Then return to the starting position.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do another round when the breathing has returned to normal.

Other details

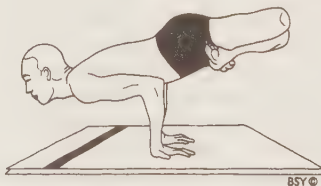
Details on breathing, awareness, duration, time of practice, sequence, limitations and benefits are as given for mayurasana. The benefits of hamsasana are basically the same as mayurasana but at a much lower level. Women can do hamsasana instead of mayurasana.

PADMA MAYURASANA (LOTUS OR BOUND PEACOCK POSE)

This is a form of mayurasana which can be done by those who can sit in padmasana.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *padma* means 'lotus flower'. Literally, the English translation would be 'the lotus peacock pose'. A better name, however, is the 'bound peacock pose'.



Technique

Sit in padmasana⁵.

Raise the body so that the weight is supported on the knees.

Place the palms flat on the floor in front of the body with the fingers pointing backwards. Bend the arms at the elbows and bring them together.

Lean forwards and place them against each side of the abdomen.

Lean further forwards so that the chest rests on the upper arms.

Find the balance point of the body.

Lean further forwards and slowly raise the folded legs.

Make the trunk, head and legs lie in one horizontal straight line.

This is the final pose.

Either hold your breath or breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable time.

Then slowly lower the knees to the ground.

Breathe normally for a short time.

Then do another round.

Other details

All other details are as given for mayurasana, but slightly less intense. This asana looks quite impressive and quite difficult, but is in fact relatively easy if you can sit in padmasana.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 1

³ Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 2

⁴ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 3)

The aim of antar mouna is to help each and every person to become his own psychiatrist. That is, it helps a person to release and resolve the problems in his mind. Even the best psychiatrist, yoga teacher, swami or whoever cannot remove your problems for you. They can only stimulate you and encourage you to remove them yourself, by helping you to face fears and conflicts etc. You have to confront and relive these subconscious experiences for yourself. Antar mouna is a psychiatric tool that helps you to do this without the direct guidance of another person.

We have already described stage 1 and 2, where one first of all becomes accustomed to outer disturbances and then, secondly, faces the spontaneous inner flow of thoughts¹.

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 3 CONSCIOUS CREATION OF THOUGHTS

This stage is exactly opposite to stage 2. You should not allow spontaneous thoughts to occur. If they arise they should be immediately eliminated. Instead you should choose a thought at will, reflect on it for some time and then throw it out. Then you should choose another thought, exhaust it, forget it and then choose another thought. This process should be continued for as long as you have time available.

Purpose

The mind is full of negatively charged thoughts (samskaras). Antar mouna stage 2 helps to release many of these mental tensions by allowing them to erupt without inhibition. However, many of these subconscious thoughts are deeply embedded in the normally inaccessible regions of the mind. They have been firmly fixed and rooted in the mind through habitual suppression. Therefore, they do not arise spontaneously. They have to be loosened from their hold on the mind by another

method. One method is stage 3 where one chooses specific thoughts at will. These posed thoughts stir up a train of other associated thoughts, some of which may be deeply embedded complexes of the mind. That is, the consciously created thoughts tend to excite and arouse deeper thoughts and memories. This helps to induce a spontaneous flow of subconscious thoughts which can then be exhausted.

We can best illustrate the function of stage 3 with an analogy. If one goes fishing, bait is fixed on a hook; this bait may be a worm or even another fish. This represents the consciously created thought. The bait is put in the water; this represents the subconscious mind. The bait attracts many hungry fish; these are the deeply embedded subconscious thoughts. Eventually a fish will be caught on the hook and lifted out of the water. This represents the removal of the previously suppressed thought. If you repeatedly put the baited hook in the water, then you will bring out more fish. If you create different conscious thoughts then you will hook and exhaust more subconscious thoughts.

The posing of conscious thoughts stirs up the mind and releases knots and blocks. It helps you to relive suppressed memories and feelings etc. that adversely influence your life from behind the scenes. When the memories, fears, etc. are fully confronted then they lose much of their force. The mind slowly becomes more and more peaceful.

Choice of thoughts and images

You can choose any thoughts that you wish, but don't waste your time choosing inconsequential thoughts. Choose negative thoughts in preference to positive thoughts; the more unpleasant, the better. Do not waste your time with thoughts such as: "I will have a bath this morning" or "What time is it?" for these thoughts are unlikely to be associated

with strong emotions; they are not likely to stir up emotionally charged thoughts from the subconscious. Choose a thought such as: "That man cheated me of money" or "I really hate my boss". These type of thoughts are much more likely to induce subconscious eruptions of other thoughts and emotions.

If you cannot think of any unpleasant thought, then choose any thought that arises. For example, you can try to remember the things that you did in the previous twenty-four hours, progressing in sequence hour by hour. Or you may choose to think about the train journey to your place of work. Let your mind follow all the events that happen on the journey. Or you may choose a thought such as: "Where did I lose my umbrella?" Expand this line of thought: "I left it in the train; no, I had it later, because I prodded someone with it when I reached my destination, yet it definitely wasn't with me when I left work." And so forth. Choose any thought and follow it. Do not let the mind wander off the theme you have chosen. Keep it on one track. Create as many thoughts as you can concerning the chosen idea. Let your thoughts follow a sequence. If you wish you can create vivid mental images, the more unpleasant, the better. These images can be integrated with the thought sequence. Most people will find this difficult, but if you can do it you will find that it is a good method of awakening suppressed subconscious thoughts, images and experiences.

Thoughts have no end, for one thought leads to another and that thought in turn leads to another. Therefore, after a certain period of time you have to cut your thought sequence, you have to leave it and create a new sequence. If you wish you can spend half an hour on one theme, especially if it is a thought sequence that is particularly disturbing. However, in general we suggest that you spend no more than a few minutes on each thought sequence.

Try not to repeat the same thought sequence, for this is a waste of valuable time. Create new trains of thought and exhaust them. Throw them out of the mind. After some practice you will develop the habit of confronting conscious thoughts and then exhausting them. This is a great help in bringing peace into the mind.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Close the eyes.

Create any thought of your choice.

Be aware of all the thoughts that you can create on the same theme.

Don't allow irrelevant thoughts to distract you.

Keep your thoughts on the chosen theme.

Create as many thoughts as you can on that one theme, allowing only thoughts that you wish to appear.

Try to be aware . . . a witness of the whole process.

Don't become overpowered by spontaneous thoughts; if they arise say to yourself: 'not now' and return to thoughts on the chosen theme. Then after a minute or so throw it out with a sudden jerk.

Create another thought, preferably a disagreeable one.

Study it for a minute or so.

Think of all aspects of that chosen thought.

Create deliberate thoughts on that theme.

Brood over it.

Then cut that train of thought.

Invite a new thought and repeat the same procedure.

Then become aware of the chidakasha – the space in front of the closed eyes².

Watch that space and allow any spontaneous thoughts to arise.

Be a witness to any thoughts or visions that arise.

This is the time when you may become aware of suppressed subconscious experiences.

Only be a witness.

Then after a minute or so again create a thought at will and create a sequence of associated thoughts.

After a minute or so wipe out your perception of the thoughts.

Choose another thought and create a sequence of related thoughts on the same theme.

Then again be aware of the chidakasha.

Only be aware of the spontaneous eruption of thoughts – don't intentionally create thoughts.

Then after a minute or so again create a new train of thought.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

This is the technique of antar mouna stage 3.

Awareness

Try to be a witness throughout the entire process.

Limited suppression

It should be noted that the wilful disposal of thought implies a degree of suppression. However, much of the emotional content of the thought is exhausted by the limited review of each created thought train. It is impossible to completely reduce the influence of thoughts because the process of reviewing itself creates more thoughts. That is, the process of thinking about thoughts itself leads to more thoughts. Therefore, there has to be a compromise: one has to release most of the emotional tension of the thoughts, but after a short period of time one has to suppress in order to create new thoughts. There is not enough time available to spend a long period following one train of thoughts. Therefore, one has to accept a small amount of suppression.

Combination of stage 2 and 3

You will note that we have combined stage 2 and 3 in the technique just described. That is, the wilful creation and disposal of thoughts is stage 3; the period of watching the spontaneous eruption of thoughts at the chidakasha is stage 2. We have done this for a good reason; the wilful creation of thoughts stirs up the subconscious; the period of watching the chidakasha allows stirred up thoughts to bubble up and be exhausted.

Readiness for stage 4

After a certain period of regular practice of stage 3 you will find that spontaneous thoughts occur before you can choose a thought on which to dwell. The frequency and intensity of these thoughts is so great and overwhelming that you will find it difficult to decide on one thought for analysis. There is a state of psychic confusion. You are then ready to proceed to stage 4³.

Notes

¹ Antar mouna: stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5; stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

³ Antar mouna: stage 4 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced jnana yoga. It is a difficult path that only brings tangible results after a period of intense practice and aspiration. It should be combined with other yogic practices, including kriya yoga, which make the mind one-pointed and enable one's constant enquiry to bring realizations.

Nauli is an excellent practice that keeps the body strong and healthy. We suggest that you master it in your spare time. We have not included it in the suggested programs because of lack of time.

You should practise either mayurasana, hamsasana or padma mayurasana according to capacity. Don't do them all.

We have described antar mouna stage 3, the conscious creation of thoughts. It is not

advisable to start this stage until you have practised stage 2 for a reasonable period of time. This may take a few months or even longer because it takes a long time to reduce the constant chatter in the mind and allow it to exhaust itself. We suggest you spend at least three months doing stage 2 before commencing stage 3.

Shabda sanchalana takes about 30 minutes to complete. This means that the first five kriyas, nos. 1 to 5, take about 80 minutes. For this reason, we have excluded the kriya practices from the one hour program. Instead, the one hour program will be reserved for general yoga practice.

Practice	Minutes
↓	
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Mayurasana, Hamasana or Padma Mayurasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Bhastrika Pranayama	10
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Antar Mouna – Stage 3	12
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhastrika Pranayama	6
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
	90

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general yoga practice

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	4
Tadasana	1
Shavasana	2
Mayurasana, Hamasana or Padma Mayurasana	3
Bhastrika Pranayama	12
Antar Mouna:	
Stage 2	10
Stage 3	10
	60

Try to find the time to practise nauli. Also, if you find sirshasana too difficult then sarvangasana can be done as a substitute.

Lesson 29

Maha Mudra

Press the perineum with the left heel while stretching the right leg forward on the ground and holding the right leg firmly with both hands.

Perform jalandhara bandha at the throat, retaining the air upwards, even as a snake beaten with a stick becomes straight like a stick.

The kundalini quickly straightens and then the breath ceases its function in both the nostrils.

Exhalation should be slow and gradual. The wise call it maha mudra. This maha mudra is able to destroy all kinds of pain and even death.

One should practise the mudra on the left side and on the right side. When both become equal, then the practice should be left.

By its influence even faulty diets are easily digested and poison can be digested like nectar. Ailments like tuberculosis, leprosy, piles, indigestion, and other diseases are destroyed by those who practise maha mudra.

This maha mudra can give great siddhis to men, and should not be given to ordinary persons.

—*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:10–18)

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 6: MAHA MUDRA (GREAT PSYCHIC ATTITUDE)

The Sanskrit word *maha* means 'great' and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'. In English this kriya can be called the 'great psychic attitude'. There are two methods, one of which should be chosen.

Rationale

Maha mudra is the first of two closely related kriyas. The second is called maha bheda mudra¹. Together they create and release a lot of energy in the physical, pranic and mental bodies.

The kriyas that we have already discussed, namely nos. 1–5, are specifically concerned with inducing pratyahara – withdrawing one's awareness of sensory perception of the outside world and the mind. The kriyas from no. 8 onwards are designed to induce dharana, mental one-pointedness. Maha mudra and maha bheda mudra act as stepping stones which simultaneously supercharge the whole system and concentrate the mind. They intensify awareness.

Scriptural references

Maha mudra is mentioned in yoga-tantra scriptures, though the descriptions tend to be either different or inadequate. The *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* states: "Maha mudra is a practice which purifies the entire network of nadis (pranic passages), balances ida and pingala and absorbs rasa (nectar of bliss) so that it pervades one's whole being." (v. 65)

"The chin should be pressed against the throat (jalandhara). The left foot should be firmly pressed against the perineum (between the anus and sexual organ). The right foot should be stretched in front and kept firmly on the ground. The two hands should hold the right foot. The breath should then be drawn in to fill the lungs; then it should be

slowly exhaled. This is called maha mudra, the destroyer of disease." (v. 66)

This brief description is similar to one method used in kriya yoga; a notable difference is that jalandhara bandha is not practised in the maha mudra of kriya yoga. The text continues: "The practice should be done by first of all breathing through the left nostril and then through the right nostril. When the ida and pingala become balanced then the mudra should be released." (v. 67) This is the hatha yoga method of maha mudra which uses nadi shodhana pranayama. The kriya yoga method is different, though it brings about the same result – meditation.

The text then describes the benefits of maha mudra: "By the power of this mudra, unwholesome foods can be digested, tasteless foods become tasteful, excess consumption and even poison can be digested by the system and converted into nectar. Various ailments such as tuberculosis, leprosy, indigestion, etc. can be cured and prevented." (v. 68, 69)

"Maha mudra bestows spiritual power and should be kept secret and not divulged to anyone." (v. 70) Maha mudra, both the hatha and kriya yoga forms, have by tradition never been publicly taught. They were always passed on from guru to disciple. It is only in recent years that these techniques have been published in accordance with the needs of the era.

Similar descriptions are given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3: 10–18) and *Gheranda Samhita* (3: 6–8). Here we are only concerned with the kriya yoga form of maha mudra.

Subsidiary practices

In order to practise maha mudra you should be familiar with the following techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama²
2. Unmani mudra³
3. Khechari mudra²
4. Shambhavi mudra⁴
5. Moola bandha⁵

You should already be familiar with the first three techniques since they are an integral part of the previous kriya practices. Shambhavi mudra (eyebrow gazing) and moola bandha are now being used in the kriyas for the first time, so you should refer back to their previous descriptions.

Note: In maha mudra, moola bandha should be done without jalandhara bandha. That is, you should merely contract the perineum without contracting the throat.

MAHA MUDRA – ALTERNATIVE 1

Sitting position

The sitting position is siddhasana (for men) or siddha yoni asana (for women). These asanas are practised specifically to apply pressure in the perineum at the mooladhara chakra trigger point⁶. If you cannot sit in

this asana you should practise maha mudra alternative 2 instead.

Technique

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Make sure that one heel firmly presses the mooladhara chakra trigger point between the anus and the sexual organ.

Hold the spine upright.

Fold your tongue into khechari mudra; maintain it throughout the entire practice.

Open the eyes and exhale deeply.

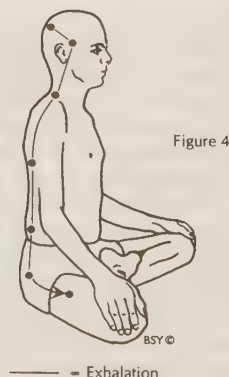
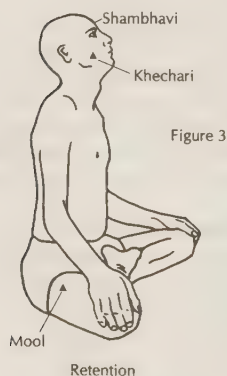
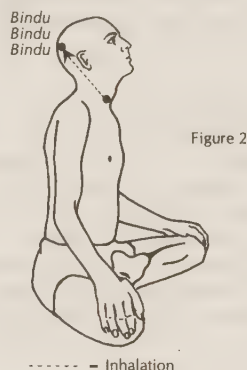
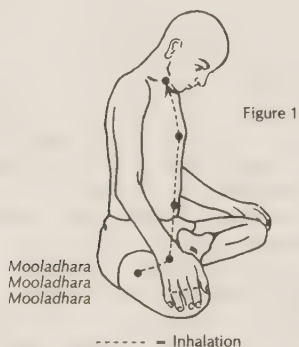
Hold your breath.

Bend your head forwards.

Be aware of the mooladhara chakra and the pressure applied by the heel.

The first round starts here.

Repeat mentally three times: 'mooladhara, mooladhara, mooladhara'.



Then inhale with ujjayi pranayama and let your awareness ascend through the chakra kshetrams in the frontal arohan passage (see figure 1).

Swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, bindu.

There should only be awareness; no mental repetition.

As your awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu, your head should slowly rise.

At bindu inhalation should be terminated and the head should lean slightly backwards (see figure 2).

Fix your awareness at bindu.

Hold your breath.

Repeat mentally: 'bindu – bindu – bindu' then practise moola bandha and shambhavi mudra while continuing to hold the breath.

Say mentally: 'shambhavi – khechari – mool' while moving your awareness through the centres of these practices (see figure 3).

When you say 'shambhavi' your awareness should be fixed at the eyebrow centre.

When you say 'khechari' your awareness should be fixed at the tongue and roof of the mouth.

When you say 'mool' your awareness should be fixed at the mooladhara chakra.

The rotation of awareness through shambhavi, khechari and mool should be done 3 times in the beginning; with practice this should be slowly increased to 12 times over a period of a few months or so.

Then release shambhavi mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Become aware of the bindu again.

Then exhale with ujjayi pranayama and let your awareness descend through the chakra trigger points in the spinal avarohan passage: 'ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana' (see figure 4).

There should only be awareness; no mental repetition.

As your awareness descends do unmani mudra.

When your awareness reaches the mooladhara chakra, exhalation should terminate and your head should gently bend forwards.

Open your eyes.

This is the end of 1 round.

The whole process is summarized in the accompanying pictures.

Now start the second round.

Hold the breath.

While fixing awareness at the mooladhara chakra mentally repeat: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Then let your awareness ascend the frontal passage as already described.

Repeat 12 rounds.

Do not strain.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout. One round is equivalent to one complete inhalation and exhalation. Hold the breath while repeating 'mooladhara' three times. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Hold the breath while repeating 'bindu' three times and while rotating awareness through shambhavi, khechari and mool. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Rotation through shambhavi, khechari and mool

Rotation of awareness through these centres must be done with retention of breath. A reasonably long retention is required in order to complete 12 rotations, therefore we suggest that beginners rotate their awareness through these centres 3 times. Gradually they can increase this by 1 rotation every week or so according to individual capacity, until they can do 12 rotations. Under no circumstances should you hold your breath for longer than is comfortable. In the practices of kriya yoga never force or strain the body in any way.

Also bear the following points in mind:

- The eyes tend to droop during rotation of awareness. Take care to focus both eyes towards the eyebrow centre in shambhavi mudra.
- Try to be aware of the three centres at the same time; this may be difficult in the beginning but it becomes easier with practice and effort.

MAHA MUDRA – ALTERNATIVE 2

Sitting position

The sitting position is called *utthanpadasana* (stretched leg pose). It has three positions:

1. Right leg straight in front of the body and the left leg folded so that the left heel presses against the mooladhara chakra (see figure 1).

2. Left leg straight and the right leg folded so that the heel presses the mooladhara chakra.
3. Both legs straight in front of the body.

Each of these positions is used in maha mudra alternative 2. In positions 1 and 2 it is important that the side of the heel firmly applies pressure on the mooladhara chakra. For men, the pressure should be applied mid-way between the anus and sexual organ; for women, against the inside edge of the vagina.

Technique

Sit in utthanpadasana with the left leg folded and the right leg straight.

Adjust your body so that you feel comfortable. Place both hands on the right knee.

Hold the back straight.

Do khechari mudra.

Open the eyes.

Bend your head forwards and become aware of the pressure at the mooladhara chakra (see figure 2).

Follow exactly the same instructions as given for alternative 1 as far as reaching awareness of the bindu.

Then mentally repeat 'bindu' 3 times:

'bindu – bindu – bindu'.

Lean forward and grasp the big toe of the right foot with the fingers of both hands.

Keep the right leg straight.

Practise shambhavi mudra and moola bandha.

Repeat 'shambhavi – khechari – mool' from 3 to 12 times, passing your awareness through the seats of these practices as you repeat their names (figure 3).

Release shambhavi mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Raise the spine to the upright position and again place the two hands on the right knee.

Again fix awareness on bindu and descend through the spinal passage as described for alternative method 1 (see figure 4).

The first round is completed when your awareness reaches mooladhara chakra.

The whole process of 1 round is shown in the accompanying pictures.

Immediately start the second round.

Repeat mentally 'mooladhara' 3 times and then ascend the frontal passage.

Do 4 complete rounds.

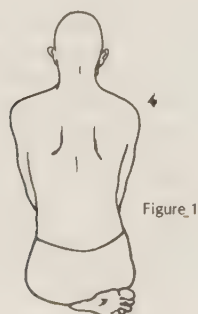


Figure 1

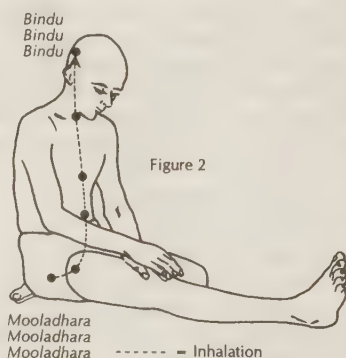


Figure 2

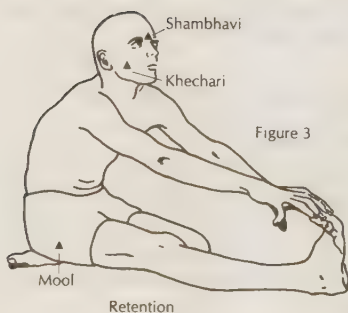


Figure 3

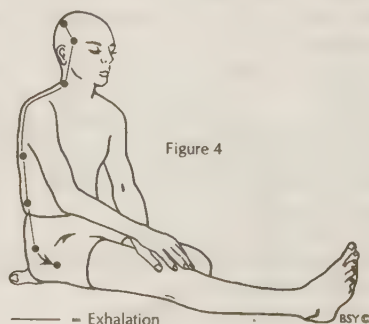


Figure 4

Then change to sitting position 2, that is, with the left leg straight and the right leg folded under the buttocks.

Make sure that the side of the right heel is firmly pressing against the mooladhara chakra.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

Then sit in position 3; that is, both legs straight in front of the body.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

This is the complete practice of maha mudra, alternative 2.

Breathing

All details are as given for alternative 1. Ensure that you do *ujjayi pranayama* throughout.

GENERAL DETAILS

Choice of method

Alternatives 1 and 2 are equally good. Both apply a firm and constant pressure at mooladhara. If you can sit easily in *siddhasana* then the best method is alternative 1. If you do not sit in *siddhasana* or find it too uncomfortable, then practise method 2.

If you sit in *siddhasana* for the previous *kriyas* 2 to 5, then *siddhasana* is the best position for maha mudra, since it ensures that there is no break in the sequence of practice. On the other hand, it is easy to become sleepy while doing *kriya yoga*. The practice of alternative 2 helps to remove sleepiness. You must choose the method that you like best.

Mental contraction of mooladhara

For the first few months of practice you should physically contract the muscles of the perineum surrounding the mooladhara chakra. When you can locate the exact position of mooladhara and your perception becomes more subtle, then you can merely 'touch' mooladhara with awareness; there is no need to contract the muscles. Also, if the mind is wandering here and there, you should physically contract mooladhara. When it becomes more one-pointed then mere awareness is sufficient or even a slight contraction. Choose according to the state of your mind.

Awareness

You should maintain awareness of the following:

- The flow of prana through the frontal (*arohan*) and spinal (*awarohan*) passages;

this should be synchronized with the breathing.

- Mental repetition of 'mooladhara, bindu, shambhavi, khechari, mool'.
- Movement of the head.
- Movement of the eyes in *unmani mudra*.
- Number of rounds completed.

Duration

You have to do 12 complete rounds whether you practise alternative 1 or 2. Beginners who rotate their awareness only 3 times through shambhavi, khechari and mool will spend about 7 minutes on the complete practice. Those who do 12 complete rotations and 12 rounds will spend about 10 minutes.

We suggest that you mentally count each round as your awareness returns to mooladhara at the end of each round.

Sequence

Maha mudra should be done immediately after *shabda sanchalana*⁷ and before maha *bheda mudra*¹.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

⁴ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

⁵ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁷ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 2

Hatha Yoga: Nauli (Stage 2)

Nauli gives many benefits. It massages the entire abdomen and stomach in a way that is unmatched by any other practice. It also massages the heart and lungs. This induces positive repercussions at both the physical, pranic and mental levels. The following is a very brief summary of the benefits:

- Improves digestion and helps to remove various malfunctions.
- Directly helps to remove constipation.
- Harmonizes the functions of the solar plexus and adrenal glands.
- Helps to alleviate diabetes by improving the efficiency of the pancreas.
- Speeds up the blood circulation and reduces blood stagnation.
- Purifies the blood.
- Strengthens the abdominal muscles; this ensures that the abdominal organs are supported properly.
- Prevents hernia. Hernia is caused by weak and inefficient abdominal muscles. Nauli strengthens these muscles and therefore prevents the occurrence of hernia. (Note: if you actually suffer from hernia you should not do nauli.)
- Nauli massages the external organs and tones up the associated nerves. This helps to remove and prevent sexual deficiency of various types.
- Increases general vitality of the whole body.
- Directly influences the manipura chakra trigger point and kshetram. The manipura is the centre of energy distribution, both gross and subtle, in the whole body. Nauli helps to remove blockages in the energy flows of the body. This leads to better health and more energy. Indirectly, nauli helps to increase mental clarity and power by harmonizing the energy flows in the body.

NAULI – STAGE 2 ABDOMINAL ROTATION

Preparation

Only if you have mastered the preparatory stage, nauli, stage 1¹, should you begin to practise stage 2 as described here. Otherwise continue to practise stage 1. Do not attempt stage 2 prematurely.

Body position

You should stand with your hands on your thighs, legs slightly bent and feet slightly apart¹.

Technique

Stand in the correct position.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe out deeply.

Accentuate the exhalation by contracting the abdominal muscles into uddiyana bandha. Hold the breath.

Do madhyama nauli¹.

Then do vama nauli (contraction on left side).

Then uddiyana bandha.

Do dakshina nauli (contraction on the right side).

And finally madhyama nauli again.

This is 1 complete rotation of the abdominal muscles.

The whole movement should be smooth and rhythmical.

Do more rolling movements or rotations.

Do as many rotations as you can with one breath retention. Do not strain.

Stop the churning movement.

Relax the abdominal muscles.

Breathe in. This is the end of 1 round.

Wait for a short time while allowing the heartbeat to return to normal.

Then again breathe out and do uddiyana bandha.

Hold your breath.

Rotate the abdominal muscles in the opposite

direction; that is, madhyama, dakshina, uddiyana, vama and finally madhyama again.

Do more rapid rotations, while retaining the breath.

Then release the contraction of the muscles and slowly breathe in.

This is the end of the second round.

Do some more rounds if you have the energy, rotating the muscles first anticlockwise and then clockwise.

Do not strain.

At first you will find rotation difficult, but with practice it will become easier; you will gain more and more conscious control over the muscles.

Breathing

Breathe out deeply before doing madhyama nauli. Hold the breath while rolling the abdominal muscles. Breathe in after releasing madhyama nauli. Breathe normally for a short period between rounds.

Speed of rotation

The speed can be very rapid or slow; it does not matter. The important thing is that the rotation should be rhythmical and combined with a strong contraction of the abdominal muscles.

Number of rounds and rotations

At first you should do no more than 10 rotations in each round. The rotations can be slowly increased up to a maximum of about 25. Beginners should only do 2 or 4 rounds, no more. As you gain more control over the muscles the number of rounds can be increased up to a maximum of 10. This is sufficient for most people.

Utility in other techniques

Nauli is an integral part of basti² and vastra dhauti³. These are two important hatha yoga techniques (shatkarmas) which will be fully explained in the near future.

Nauli is not an easy practice to describe nor learn from a book. If you have any problems we suggest that you contact an experienced local teacher or ashram.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3

² Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 2

³ Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 2

Asana: Practice

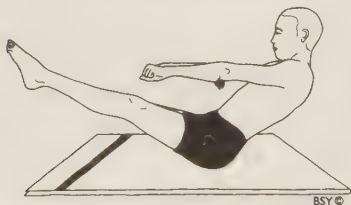
Here we will describe the following asanas:

1. Mukta hasta merudandasana
2. Merudandasana
3. Utthita hasta merudandasana
4. Niralamba paschimottanasana

These four asanas are very similar. They are forward bending asanas that require balance. You do not need to do all of them regularly. Try them, and then choose one that you like best.

MUKTA HASTA MERUDANDASANA (ROCKING HORSE POSE)

The English translation of this asana is 'the rocking horse pose' as it resembles a wooden rocking horse in the final pose. This pose is also known as ashwa sanchalanasana.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the back straight.

Fold the legs so that the knees are near the chest.

Bend your arms at the elbows.

Clench your fists and place them near or on the outside of the knees.

Breathe in deeply.

Lean backwards while simultaneously straightening and raising the arms and legs.

Keep the fists in contact on or near the knees.

The final pose is shown.

The whole body should be balanced on the buttocks.

Try to raise the legs as high as possible keeping them straight.

Hold your breath in the final position.

Stay in the final raised pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then lower and bend the legs into the starting position.

This is 1 round.

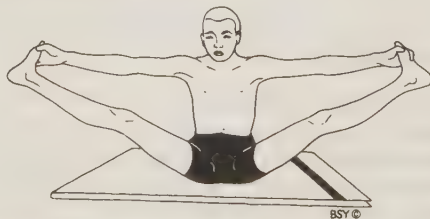
After a short rest do another round.

Other details

This is an excellent preparation for merudandasana, utthita hasta merudandasana and niralamba paschimottanasana. All other information is given in the 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

MERUDANDASANA (SPINAL COLUMN POSE)

The Sanskrit word *meru* literally means 'mountain' or 'peak' and *danda* means 'stick' or 'pole'. Here *merudanda* means the spine. The ancient rishis described the spine as a stick with a series of undulating peaks, which is not a bad description. The length of the spine from top to bottom is indeed like a long mountain range. The English name of this asana is 'the spinal column pose'.



Technique

Take a sitting position on the floor.

Bend the legs at the knees.

Place the soles of the feet flat on the floor in front of the buttocks, about half a metre apart.

Hold the big toes with the thumb and index finger of each hand.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe in deeply.

Lean back slowly and straighten the two legs. Simultaneously try to separate the legs as much as possible.

The final pose is shown.

Straighten the legs and arms while maintaining the hold of the fingers on the big toes.

Raise the legs as high as is comfortable.

Hold the breath in the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then return to the starting pose.

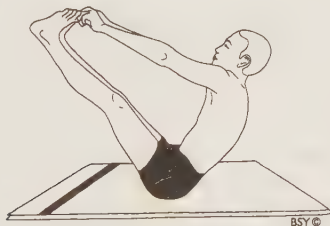
This is 1 round.

Repeat another round when the breathing has returned to normal.

For all other information refer to 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

UTTHITA HASTA MERUDANDASANA (RAISED HAND AND SPINE POSE)

The word *utthita* means 'raised'; *hasta* means 'hand'; *merudanda* means 'spine'. In English this asana can be called 'raised hand and spine pose'. This asana is very similar to merudandasana.



Technique

Take a sitting position.

Bend the legs and place the soles of the feet together on the ground in front of the buttocks.

Hold the big toes with the thumb and index finger of each hand.

Breathe in deeply.

Lean backwards and straighten the two legs, keeping them together.

The body should be supported and balanced only on the buttocks.

The arms and legs should be straight and together.

Hold the breath and final pose for as long as possible.

Then lower the legs to the starting position.

Rest for a short period of time.

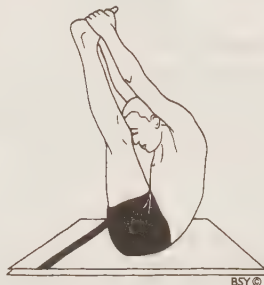
Then repeat.

All details are given under the 'General Details' heading.

NIRALAMBA PASCHIMOTTANASANA (UNSUPPORTED BACK STRETCHING POSE)

The word *niralamba* means 'unsupported'; the rough translation of *paschimottan* is 'back stretch'. The English name of this asana is the 'unsupported back stretching pose'¹.

Niralamba paschimottanasana requires a very flexible spine. Before trying it you should master paschimottanasana.



Technique

Sit on the floor with the knees bent.

Grasp the soles of your feet as shown.

This is the starting pose.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe in deeply.

Raise your feet.

Try to straighten your legs.

Maintain balance.

Firmly maintain hold of the feet with the hands.

Adjust yourself so that you are perfectly balanced.

Breathe out.

Then breathe in deeply.

By pulling your arms try to draw your head towards the knees. Don't strain.

Try to relax your back as much as possible.

In the final pose either:

1. hold the breath, or
2. breathe deeply and slowly.

After a comfortable length of time slowly lower the legs to the starting position.

Relax the whole body and breathe normally.

This is the end of 1 round.

If you wish you can try another round.

GENERAL DETAILS

The following details apply to all four asanas.

Awareness

Be aware of balance and breath. If you wish you can fix your concentration on a fixed point on the wall in front of the body.

Limitations

These four asanas should not be practised by those people who suffer from:

- high blood pressure
- heart ailments
- slipped disc
- sciatica

Number of rounds

Mukta hasta merudandasana, merudandasana and utthita hasta merudandasana can be done up to five times each. Niralamba paschimottanasana can be done up to three times.

Benefits

All of these four asanas have similar benefits. They strengthen the whole spinal column and help to realign displaced vertebrae. They tone up the entire nervous system, including the sympathetic and parasympathetic. All the abdominal organs are squeezed and activated. Intestinal peristalsis is stimulated. They develop the sense of balance and mental concentration.

The benefits of niralamba paschimottanasana are almost the same as for paschimottanasana¹.

Notes

¹ For further details on the meaning of paschimottanasana refer to Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2.

Pranayama: Moorchha Pranayama

MOORCHHA PRANAYAMA (THE FAINTING PRANAYAMA)

There are various methods of doing moorchha pranayama. In this topic we will describe two types that are specifically mentioned in the yogic scriptures and which we teach in our ashram. They are both excellent techniques that can bring many benefits at all levels. Practise them yourself and choose the method you prefer.

Definition

The word *moorchha* means 'fainting'. Moorchha pranayama can be called the 'fainting pranayama'. It is so called because it induces a state of light-headedness and swoon. It helps to cut off the distractions of the outside world, destroy identification with the physical body and bring mental tranquillity.

Sitting position

Moorchha pranayama can be practised in any comfortable meditation position. The best asanas are padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana, swastikasana and ardha padmasana, though vajrasana and sukhasana can be used¹.

Technique 1

In the *Gheranda Samhita* it says: "Do kumbhaka (breath retention) and then do shambhavi mudra (gazing at the eyebrow centre). Discard all desires and thoughts. Feel the experience of fainting. Unite your mind with atma and enjoy bliss." (v. 5:83)

This is the method that we normally teach. The technique is as follows:

Sit in any comfortable sitting asana.

Hold the spine and head upright.

Relax the whole body.

Fold your tongue against the upper palate – khechhari mudra².

Do shambhavi mudra³.



Inhale deeply and slowly with ujjayi pranayama².

Simultaneously bend the head backwards so that the movement of the head is synchronized with the inhalation.

At the end of inhalation your head should lean backwards but not completely.

Straighten the arms and lock the elbows, pressing the knees with the hands.

Continue to practise khechhari mudra.

Hold kumbhaka (breath retention) for as long as possible, but without strain.

Fix your whole awareness on the eyebrow centre.

Then bend the arms.

Slowly exhale with ujjayi pranayama as you bend your head forwards.

Simultaneously practise unmani mudra⁴; that is, slowly close your eyes as you exhale and move your head.

At the end of exhalation your head should face forwards and the eyes should be completely closed.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe normally.

Keeping the eyes closed, feel the lightness and calmness pervading the whole mind.

This is the end of 1 complete round.

Repeat another round.

Do shambhavi mudra.

Maintain khechhari.

Inhale with ujjayi pranayama and slowly lean the head backwards.

Continue as before.
Do as many rounds as time will allow.

Technique 2

In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* it says: "After pooraka (inhalation) you should do jalandhara bandha. Then do rechaka (exhalation). This practice is called moorchha pranayama; it makes the mind swoon and brings bliss." (v. 2:69)

The technique is as follows:
Sit in any comfortable asana.
Hold the head and back upright.
Do khechari mudra².
Do shambhavi mudra³.
Inhale with ujjayi pranayama⁴.
At the end of inhalation do kumbhaka.
Practise jalandhara bandha⁵.
Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable.
Then while maintaining jalandhara bandha slowly breathe out.
Continue to practise shambhavi mudra and khechari mudra.
The first round is completed at the end of exhalation.
Repeat more rounds.

Awareness

In both techniques you should be aware of:

- breathing and sound of breath
- head movement
- eyebrow centre

Duration

A few minutes practice will bring some benefits which you can experience for yourself. About ten minutes is sufficient to start. Do each round for as long as possible without strain. Slowly increase the duration with regular practice. Stop the practice when you feel the fainting sensation. To bring optimum benefits this pranayama should be done for a reasonably long period of time, say one hour or more every day for advanced practitioners.

Kumbhaka

The longer the kumbhaka (breath retention), the greater the benefits. The stopping of breath acts directly on the mind via the pranic body to induce voidness of thought. Kumbhaka is the essence of moorchha pranayama.

In the correct environment, with intense self-purification and a carefully selected diet, it is

possible to slowly develop the capacity to hold the breath for long periods of time. Without preparation, however, we strongly advise you against attempting long kumbhaka; you may easily harm yourself.

Limitations

People who suffer from high blood pressure, vertigo or brain haemorrhage should not do moorchha pranayama.

Warning

You should not practise until you become unconscious. The aim of the practice is to induce a state of semi-fainting, not complete unconsciousness. Stop the practice when you feel a fainting sensation.

Sequence

The best time to practise moorchha is after asanas and immediately before meditation.

Physiological reason for fainting

The fainting sensation and light-headedness arise due to the following reasons:

Pressurization of the carotid sinuses in the throat by the combined practices of ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra and jalandhara bandha (in technique 2). The carotid sinuses are located in the neck beside the carotid artery which supplies the brain with its vital supply of oxygenated blood. These sinuses are sensitive to pressure and they regulate the heart rate and pressure and match it with respiration. They are vital in maintaining the oxygen balance of the body, among other things. During moorchha pranayama these sinuses are compressed continuously; this reduces the blood flow to the brain and directly induces fainting.

Kumbhaka further reduces the oxygen supply to the brain. This becomes especially noticeable if kumbhaka is held for a long time. The brain is hypoventilated. This leads to fainting.

These two influences, compression of the carotid sinuses and kumbhaka, supplement each other and anaesthetize the mind so that it becomes one-pointed. All mental fluctuations are stilled.

Benefits

Moorchha pranayama is a very powerful practice especially if it is done with extended

kumbhaka It relaxes the entire mind and body. It withdraws one's awareness from the outside world (pratyahara) so that all external sounds, feelings, smells, etc. are cut off. Simultaneously, it renders the mind free of thoughts. This leads to meditation and bliss.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2.

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

⁴ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

⁵ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 4)

A vast number of diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure and asthma etc. are caused primarily by mental disturbance, tension and suppressed feelings. Other factors are also involved, but we feel the main cause lies in the mind. Mental tensions reflect in the body. Extreme tension, dissatisfaction or frustration in the mind over a long period of time leads to manifestation of physical malfunction in some form or another, that is, disease.

Regular practice of antar mouna brings about a gradual release of pent-up mental tension and suppressed emotions. This in turn leads to more relaxation at a pranic and physical level. That is, relaxation of the mind leads to the removal of blockages in the pranic channels of the body; the flow of prana is allowed to circulate to every part of the body without impediment. There is a progressive removal of chronic muscular tensions. Organs such as the digestive organs are allowed to function more efficiently, unhindered by turmoil in the mind. The endocrinal system begins to function smoothly without being continually overloaded. In this manner, physical and pranic disorders can be gradually alleviated. The whole body finds its lost state of good health and becomes infused with a new level of vitality. There are many benefits to be gained by including the practice of antar mouna as part of your daily life.

If you have not yet practised the three previous stages, then we suggest that you start with stage 1. If you have been regularly practising these first three stages, then you can proceed to stage 4¹.

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 4 AWARENESS AND DISPOSAL OF SPONTANEOUS THOUGHTS

In stage 1, attention is directed to sense impressions from the outside world. In stage 2, there is awareness of the spontaneous eruption

of thoughts. In stage 3, there is wilful creation of thoughts and then the disposal of them at will. In this stage, stage 4, the process is as follows:

1. Allow spontaneous eruption of thoughts
2. Then choose a thought that seems especially strong
3. Reflect on that thought for some time
4. Then wilfully dispose of it
5. Again become aware of the spontaneous flow of thoughts
6. Repeat the process.

Purpose

The purpose of this stage is to face deeper, subtle thoughts and visions buried in the subconscious mind. At a certain stage on the yogic path these subtle thoughts will bubble up spontaneously. It is very easy to get attached to them, for they open up and indicate a new dimension of your being that you probably did not know existed. But you should try to remain detached, for they are distractions that prevent further progress. They are obstacles to deeper perception of one's being. They may be precognitive or they may be memories of events that happened long, long ago. They are nevertheless no more than subtle distractions. Try to resist the temptation to attach significance and see deeper meaning in them.

Compare this to a man who sets out to see a friend. His destination is his friend's house; your destination is the inner core of your being. If the man is distracted by everything that he meets, if he smells each flower or talks to each person that he sees, then he will take a long time to reach his destination. It is the same if you become attached to and distracted by psychic scenery; it will take you a long time to reach your destination. Go straight to the goal and do not waste time en-route. Merely witness all these subtle impressions. The confrontation of these subtle impressions leads

to progressive purging of the mind at deeper levels. Gradually the mind becomes more and more refined and lucid.

Preparation

Before practising stage 4, your mind and body should be systematically relaxed. Without this preparation, the subtle impressions will not arise and you will gain little from the practice. We suggest that you precede antar mouna stage 4 by the practise of other yogic techniques. Asanas and pranayama are preferred; therefore the best time to practise antar mouna stage 4 is at the end of your daily practice program.

Alternately, you can practise japa or ujjayi breath awareness for a few minutes². A simple and effective practice for inducing relaxation is kaya sthairyam². Choose any method that you like and practise it for a few minutes as a preliminary to stage 4.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Close your eyes.

Hold the head and spine upright and relax the whole body.

For a few minutes systematically relax your mind-body by doing any preliminary practice, such as kaya sthairyam or breath awareness.

Then begin stage 4.

Let all thoughts arise spontaneously.

Do not create any thoughts as you did previously in stage 3.

Be aware of the continuous flow of thoughts.

Try to be an impartial witness.

If you are sufficiently relaxed then thoughts will arise and spew out of the subconscious; there will be an overflow of thoughts.

Many of the thoughts will be expressed in the form of psychic visions.

The process is almost like mental diarrhoea.

Continue to be aware of the process.

Suddenly, among this confusion, you may become aware of one thought that is more prominent than the rest.

Reflect on it for a short time.

Try not to identify with it; then wilfully throw it out.

This thought is a projection of the deeper realms of the subconscious mind; it may be a pleasant or unpleasant thought . . . it does not matter.

You may be tempted to brood over it for a long period; try to resist this temptation; merely reflect on it for a few seconds and then throw it out.

The thought should arrive spontaneously, but should be deliberately and wilfully ejected.

Continue to be aware of the spontaneous eruption of thoughts.

Another prominent thought will suddenly present itself.

Reflect on it for a few seconds.

Then dispose of it.

Resume awareness of the thought process.

Continue in this manner for the duration of the practice, alternating between awareness of spontaneous thought flow and reflection on specific chosen thoughts that emerge from the bubbling thoughts.

Try to remain a witness throughout.

This is antar mouna stage 4.

No flow of thoughts

It is possible that you will not experience this overflowing of spontaneous thoughts. Your mind may remain extroverted. In this case, you should again start to practise stage 1. It means that you have prematurely started to practise stage 4. Spend a few more months doing stages 1, 2 and 3 in turn.

It is also possible that you experience a temporary suspension of thoughts in the practice. That is, during the spontaneous flow of thoughts, there will arise a state of blankness. In this case, you should patiently wait for the inner flow to recommence. Try to remain aware: 'I am practising antar mouna' and passively watch the chidakasha – the space in front of the closed eyes.

Extension of each stage

We do not recommend that you start stage 4 until you have fully practised the previous stages. If necessary you should spend several months on stages 2 and 3. If you spend only a few days on each stage then you will gain little benefit.

Practise each stage until you are ready to begin the next stage. The signs of this readiness are clear and we have described them for each stage¹. Check these signs carefully and use them as a guide to tell you when to proceed to the next stage.

Readiness for Stage 5

Stage 5 arises automatically when the thought process almost stops or stops completely. Stage 5 starts when there is a state of thoughtlessness³.

Notes

¹ Antar mouna: stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5; stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5; stage 3 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5

² Japa: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 6; Ujjayi pranayama – Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5; Kaya sthairyam – Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 6

³ Antar mouna: stage 5 – Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4.

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson and for the remainder of the book we are mainly concerned with practice; that is, describing the techniques of kriya yoga and other yogic techniques so that you can try them for yourself. Here we have discussed the following practices:

1. Maha mudra, the sixth of the kriya yoga techniques. This should be added to the kriyas that you already know and practise.
2. Nauli, stage 2. If you have perfected stage 1 then you can proceed to develop the ability to rotate the abdominal muscles (stage 2). Try to find some spare time to practise outside your daily practice program.
3. Antar mouna, stage 4. If you have practised the previous stages of antar mouna for at least a few months then proceed to stage 4 – awareness and disposal of spontaneous thoughts.
4. Moorchha pranayama is a very powerful practice. Try it for yourself but don't retain your breath beyond your capacity.
5. Ashwa sanchalana, merudandasana, utthita hasta merudandasana and niralamba paschimottanasana have been described. Don't do all of them. Choose and practise one of them according to capacity; beginners can do ashwa sanchalana and more advanced practitioners can try niralamba paschimottanasana.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Antar Mouna – Stage 4	15
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
	93

We have added 3 extra minutes onto the program so that surya namaskara can be included to loosen up the body in preparation for kriya yoga practice. Try to find the time to do some asanas, pranayama and meditative practice.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general yoga practice

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Merudandasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	3
Sirshasana	4
Tadasana	1
Moorchha Pranayama	10
Antar Mouna:	
Stage 2	7
Stage 3	7
Stage 4	10
	60

Lesson 30

It makes no difference whether you worship God, Jehovah, Allah, Mohammed, Buddha, Christ or Krishna – it is still and always one and the same Cod. The difference is only in name, such as God, Gott, Dieu or Dios.

The omnipotent, the almighty, is and always will be the same, whether one is Hindu, Brahmin, Christian or whatever.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 7: MAHA BHEDA MUDRA (GREAT PIERCING PSYCHIC ATTITUDE)

The Sanskrit word *maha* means 'great'; *bheda* means 'piercing' and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'. This kriya is therefore called 'the great piercing psychic attitude'. It supplements and directly follows maha mudra¹. Together they supercharge the whole mind-body.

There are two alternative methods. Choose and practise either one according to your capacity and preference.

Subsidiary practices

To do maha bheda mudra you should know the following basic techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama²
2. Khechari mudra²
3. Unmani mudra³
4. Moola bandha⁴
5. Nasikagra drishti⁵
6. Jalandhara bandha⁶
7. Uddiyana bandha⁷

You should already know the first three techniques since they are an integral part of the previous kriyas numbers 3 to 9. Nasikagra drishti, uddiyana bandha, jalandhara bandha and the full form of moola bandha should be mastered.

MAHA BHEDA MUDRA – ALTERNATIVE 1

Sitting position

Men should sit in siddhasana⁸ and women in siddha yoni asana. If you cannot do these asanas then you should do alternative 2.

Technique

Sit with the back held upright.

Ensure that one heel firmly presses against the mooladhara chakra trigger point.

Open the eyes.

Do khechari mudra; maintain it for the entire practice.

Exhale deeply.

Hold the breath.

Gently rest the chin against the chest.

The first round begins here.

Be aware of the mooladhara chakra and mentally repeat: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Inhale with ujjayi pranayama while moving awareness upwards through the kshetram in the frontal (arohan) passage (see figure 1): swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, bindu.

There should be no mental repetition; only awareness.

Your head should be slowly raised as awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu.

At bindu there should be breath retention and the head should lean slightly backwards.

While fixing awareness at bindu mentally repeat: 'bindu – bindu – bindu'.

Then with ujjayi exhalation let your awareness slowly descend through the spinal (awarohan) passage (see figure 2).

Be aware of the chakras in turn: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara.

Do unmani mudra with descent of awareness. Hold your breath when your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Fix your awareness on mooladhara and mentally repeat 3 times 'mooladhara', i.e.: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Do jalandhara bandha while continuing to retain the breath.

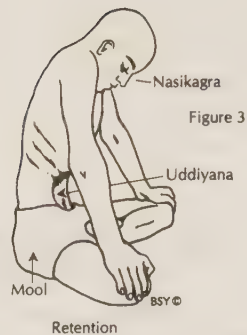
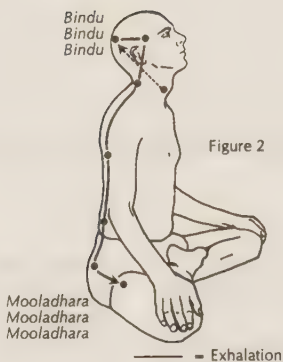
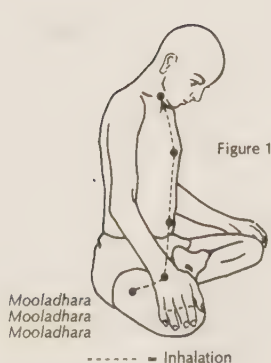
Do moola bandha.

Do uddiyana bandha.

Do nasikagra drishti.

Say mentally: 'nasikagra, uddiyana, mool'. Simultaneously your awareness should move to the centres of these practices (see figure 3). When you say 'nasikagra', awareness should be fixed at the nose tip.

When you say 'uddiyana', your awareness should be fixed at the navel.



When you say 'mool', your awareness should be fixed at the mooladhara chakra. This rotation 'nasikagra – uddiyana – mool' should be done 3 times by beginners and slowly increased to 12 times over a period of weeks or months.

Release nasikagra drishti.

Release moola bandha.

Release uddiyana bandha.

Release jalandhara bandha, but do not raise your head.

Become aware of the mooladhara chakra again.

This is the end of the first round.

The whole process is summarized in the accompanying pictures.

Now start the second round.

Hold the breath with awareness at mooladhara.

Mentally repeat: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Then let your awareness ascend the frontal passage with ujjayi pranayama.

Repeat 12 rounds. Do not strain.

Breathing

Ujjayi pranayama should be done throughout the practice. Retain the breath while repeating 'mooladhara' three times. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Retain the breath while repeating 'bindu' three times. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Application of bandhas and nasikagra drishti

Make sure that all the bandhas are done correctly and in the right sequence. At first you will have to pay close attention to this, but with regular practice the bandhas will lock and tighten automatically without effort and at the right stage of the kriya.

Also note that the nose tip gazing is subtly yet directly related to the application of the bandhas. Nasikagra drishti helps to tighten the lock of the bandhas. Make sure that nasikagra drishti and the bandhas are done simultaneously and that you do not forget to do them while rotating awareness through the centres nasikagra, uddiyana and mool.

Beginners will find it difficult to practise nasikagra drishti for more than a minute or so without feeling pain and discomfort in the eyes. Do not strain. If necessary stop doing nasikagra drishti when you feel discomfort but continue the bandhas and rotation of awareness. Slowly increase the duration of nasikagra as the eye muscles adapt themselves to the new practice.

Rotation through nasikagra, uddiyana and mool

This rotation of awareness is done while holding the breath. Beginners are advised to practise only 3 rotations at first, slowly increasing by one round at a time as they develop the ability to easily hold the breath for a longer duration. Eventually you should do the complete 12 rotations.

MAHA BHEDA MUDRA – ALTERNATIVE 2

Sitting position

You should sit in *utthanpadasana* (stretched leg pose) as described in alternative method 2 of maha mudra¹.

Technique

Sit in *utthanpadasana* with the left leg folded and the right leg straight.

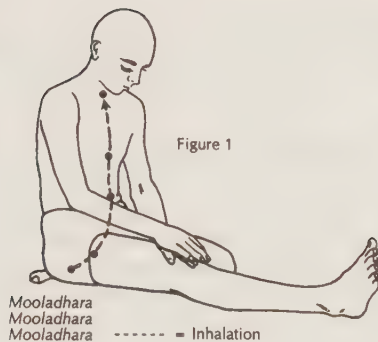


Figure 1

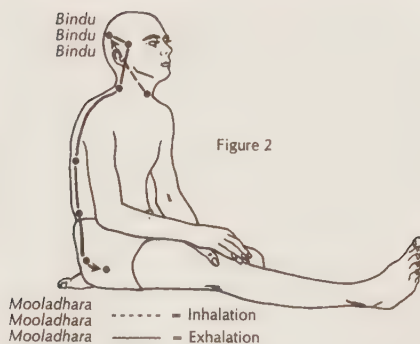


Figure 2

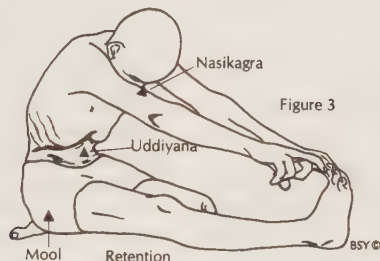


Figure 3

Place your hands on the right knee.
Open your eyes.
Hold the back straight but relaxed.
Exhale deeply.
Bend the head forwards.
Fix the awareness at mooladhara chakra.
Repeat mentally: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

The first round starts here (see figure 1).

With ujjayi inhalation let your awareness ascend the frontal pranic passage in the way already described for alternative method 1.
Raise your head as you pass from vishuddhi to bindu.

Repeat 'bindu' 3 times mentally.

Then with ujjayi exhalation descend the spinal avarohan passage, with awareness of the chakras enroute (see figure 2).

Do unmani mudra with descent.

Exhalation should be completed by the time your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Hold your breath.

Fix awareness at mooladhara chakra.

Repeat mentally: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Then bend the head forwards and do jalandhara bandha.

Bend forwards and grasp the toes of the

extended right foot with both hands.

Do moola bandha, uddiyana and then nasikagra drishti (this is the position shown in figure 3).

Continue to hold the breath.

Say mentally: 'nasikagra, uddiyana, mool'.

Simultaneously your awareness should move through the seats of these practices (see figure 3).

Do 3 to 12 rotations according to your ability to retain the breath; don't strain.

Then release nasikagra drishti, moola bandha, uddiyana bandha and jalandhara bandha one after the other.

Keep your head leaning forwards.

Raise the back to the upright position.

Place the 2 hands on the right knee again.

Fix awareness at the mooladhara chakra.

This is the end of 1 round.

The complete process is shown in the accompanying pictures.

Immediately start the next round.

Raise your awareness through the frontal passage with ujjayi inhalation.

Do 4 complete rounds.

Then change the sitting position so that the left leg is straight and the right leg folded under the buttocks.

Ensure that the side of the right heel presses firmly against the mooladhara chakra area.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

Then sit so that both legs are straight in front of the body.

Do 4 more complete rounds.

This gives a total of 12 rounds which is the end of maha bheda alternative method 2.

Note: after finishing 4 rounds in each pose you should raise awareness to the bindu, repeat the bindu mantra, descend to mooladhara, repeat the mooladhara mantra and then relax.

Breathing

All details are as given for alternative 1.

GENERAL DETAILS

Choice of method

Both maha mudra (kriya 6) and maha bheda mudra (kriya 7) have two alternative methods. Each alternative of maha mudra has the same sitting position as the corresponding alternative in maha bheda mudra. Therefore, in order to bring continuity and flow into your practice we suggest that you either do both alternatives 1 or both alternatives 2.

Awareness

During the practice of this kriya you should be aware of the following:

1. The flow of prana through arohan and awaren passages and the chakras and kshetrams in turn.
2. Mental repetition of mooladhara, bindu, nasikagra, uddiyana and mool mantras.
3. Movement of head and eyes.
4. Number of rounds completed.

Duration

For the complete practice you have to do 12 rounds. Beginners who do only 3 rotations of nasikagra, uddiyana and mool will take about 8 minutes; those who do 12 complete rotations for 12 rounds will require about 10 minutes.

Sequence

Maha bheda mudra is to be done immediately after maha mudra¹ and before manduki mudra⁹.

Counting of rounds

Mentally count each round just before your awareness ascends the frontal passage.

Rest

Both maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are strenuous practices, especially in the beginning. If you wish you can take a short rest just after maha mudra before starting maha bheda mudra. During this short rest, say one or two minutes, you should close your eyes and fix your awareness on breathing.

Specific influence

Both maha mudra and maha bheda mudra are physical methods that have a profound influence at a pranic level. They specifically influence three centres: mooladhara chakra, manipura chakra and ajna chakra. Whether you are aware of it or not, these two kriyas manipulate and harness the energies within the chakras for the inducement of concentration of mind and meditation.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 3

⁴ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁵ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

⁶ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁷ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

⁸ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁹ Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 3

Hatha Yoga: Basti

Basti is a hatha yoga method of cleaning the colon by sucking in air or water through the anus. It is one of the shatkarmas (six cleaning processes) that have been practised in India since time immemorial¹.

It is a direct and obvious method of washing and purifying the bowels, yet strangely it is rarely taught by yoga teachers or mentioned in modern books on yoga. This is a great pity because basti is reasonably easy to do and can bring many results. The purpose of this topic is to explain the basic technique and try to encourage you to practise it yourself.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *basti* (also widely written as *vasti* or *wasti*) is a general word that relates to anything pertaining to the lower abdomen, belly, pelvis and bladder. The technique of basti is widely called *basti karma*. The word *karma* in this context means 'process or technique'. Therefore, *basti* or *basti karma* is a process concerned with cleaning the lower part of the abdomen, specifically the colon.

There are two types of basti: *sthala* and *jala*. These have derivations and meanings as follows:

1. *Sthala basti*: The word *sthala* means 'ground'. Sthala basti is a practice where one stands on dry ground; in other words, it is a practice where one sucks air into the anus (instead of water). The technique is also called sushka basti, the word *sushka* meaning 'dry'. Therefore, *sushka basti* means 'dry basti' or more exactly 'air basti'. Another name for air basti is *vata basti*, where the word *vata* means 'air'. It is the practice which cleans the colon with air.
2. *Jala basti*: The word *jala* means 'water', therefore *jala basti* is the practice where one sucks water into the anus. It is also called *vari basti*, *vari* meaning 'water'. Therefore, *vari basti* is the process of cleaning the colon with water.

These two practices, air and water basti, are very similar, so we will describe them together.

Scriptural references

Unlike some other yogic practices, basti is quite well described in some of the traditional yogic scriptures. The following are quotations from the *Gheranda Samhita*: "Basti karma is said to be of two types – jala and sushka. Jala basti is done in water while sushka is done on land (that is in air)." (1:46) This verse is a repeat of what we have already explained under the previous heading.

The text continues: "Stand in *utkatasana* in water to the height of the navel. Contract and expand the anus. This is called *jala basti*." (1:47) *Utkatasana* is a standing pose in which one bends the legs slightly, leans forwards and presses the hands on the thighs just above the knees. It is the same position in which one does *navli*². The method described in this verse is a very simple method in which one merely contracts and relaxes the anal sphincters. This is called *ashwini mudra*³. It helps to cool and relax the abdominal organs.

The text continues: "Urinary, digestive and wind problems are cured by *jala basti*. The body becomes pure and looks like *Kama Deva* (Cupid)." (1:48) We do not make any promises that you will become like Cupid, but certainly *jala basti* will help you to remain or become healthy.

The scripture then proceeds to describe *sthala basti*: "Sit in *paschimottanasana* and do basti. Contract and expand the anus (*ashwini mudra*)." "This practice prevents abdominal problems. It stimulates the digestive fire and eliminates wind problems." (1:49–50)

The *Gheranda Samhita* only describes the simple form of air and water basti. No mention is made of the sucking of air or water into the anus. It seems that instructions for this method of yogic enema was left to the guru to explain to his disciple.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* briefly mentions the more advanced method of basti as follows: "Stand navel deep in water. Do utkatasana. Insert a tube into the anus. This cleaning process is called basti karma." (2:26)

The insertion of the tube into the anus is one method of basti that we will shortly describe. Without any more practical details, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* then proceeds to expound the benefits: "Basti karma removes all ailments associated with vata, pitta and kapha (the three progressively more subtle principles of man's being used in ayurveda)." (2:27) "The practice of jala basti makes the bones, muscles, semen, senses (or perception and action) and the antah karana (literally the inner instrument, the mind) healthy. The body glows with vitality. Physical faults are removed." (2:28) The scriptures regard basti as a very useful and beneficial practice.

The use of a tube

One traditional method of doing basti is to insert a thin bamboo tube into the anus. This allows air or water to be sucked easily into the colon via the anus. The boon of modern technology means that a thin plastic tube can also be used. In fact plastic is preferable to bamboo since it is smoother and more flexible. Bamboo could be a little harsh on the sphincter muscles of the anus.

If you are sitting or standing in water then the tube can be ten to twenty centimetres long. It should be inserted into the anus by gently opening up the anal sphincters with your fingers. Don't strain. As you insert your fingers and the tube you will find that muscles automatically expand. This makes insertion of the tube easy and prevents injury to the anus.

When the tube is in place you should practise basti. After the water or air has been drawn into the colon, then the protruding end of the tube should be blocked with one finger; this will retain the water or air inside the colon.

If you wish you can use a tube; it is one method of doing basti. However, the tube must be smooth; if not then it is very easy to harm the delicate lining of the anus. Also one must be gentle when inserting the tube. The use of a tube is a good method, if you take care. However, the method that we generally recommend is to merely open the anal sphincters with the fingers. This is much safer and

much easier. It is this method that we have described.

The use of a tube has one big advantage in connection with jala basti: water can be sucked up into the colon from a small container. That is, one can practise basti without standing in a river or a deep bath.

Gravity feed method

The most common method of using an enema is gravity feed. Water or whatever is being used as enema is kept in a container above the level of the anus. A thin tube feeds the water from the container directly into the anus. The water flows directly into the colon under the force of gravity; no effort is necessary. Special tubes and containers can be obtained from a chemist shop.

The gravity feed method is very similar to basti and is certainly much easier. Basti requires some degree of muscular control. If a person has severe constipation and cannot do basti, we recommend that they adopt the gravity feed method. However, we suggest that he or she tries to master basti since it has the following advantages:

- Develops strength and control of the abdominal muscles. This is necessary in order to suck the air or water into the bowels. This alone helps to improve the efficiency and health of the abdominal organs.
- Simultaneously massages the inner organs and tones up the nerves.
- Requires little or no equipment. If you can do basti (with or without a tube) then do it in preference to a gravity feed enema. If you cannot do basti then use gravity feed, but you should gradually aim to develop more control over the abdominal muscles in order to practise basti in the future. We recommend that you practise yogic techniques such as bhastrika pranayama⁴, uddiyana bandha⁵ and asanas in general.

Preparatory practices

Before attempting basti you should master madhyama nauli². This is necessary in order to suck water or air into the colon.

Water and bath

For air basti no water or bath is required. For water basti you will have to sit or stand in a bath of water. The water level should be such that it

is just above the level of the anus. The depth of water required will depend on the sitting position. That is, if you sit in paschimottanasana then five to ten centimetres is sufficient. On the other hand, if you stand in utkatasana the water will need to be much deeper.

The water should be neither excessively cold or hot. If you have sufficient time then you can first of all use warm water (about body temperature – 98° Fahrenheit is ideal). This warm water will loosen hard encrusted stool from the walls of the colon. Then you can use cooler water (not freezing); this will tone up the nerves of the colon and anus and will stimulate the blood circulation. This will be very useful if you suffer from piles or constipation.

Other enemas

There are many other types of herbal enemas that can be used instead of water and air. They can be used for specific needs. Generally, however, water or air are more than sufficient.

Body position

You should use any one of the following asanas while doing basti:

Utkatasana (unyielding pose). This is the asana in which one practises nauli². This is the traditional method recommended by the *Gheranda Samhita* and *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*. The legs should be separated by about half a metre. They should be bent at the knees and one should lean forwards and place the hands on the thighs just above the knees.

This asana can be used for jala (water) and sthala (air) basti, but if you practise jala basti in this pose then the water will have to be deep. If you have the facilities available to obtain this depth of water then you can use this pose.

Kagasana (crow pose). This is the squatting pose⁶. It is very easy for orientals but difficult for occidentals. It is an ideal position for sucking in both air and water. Less than thirty centimetres of water is required.

Paschimottanasana (back stretching pose)⁷. A simplified version of the full form of this asana can be used for basti. One should sit on the ground for air basti or in water for jala basti. The legs should be stretched out in front of the body. Exhale as deeply as possible by leaning forwards into the final pose of paschimottanasana; that is one must breathe out and try to touch the head to the knees.

Do not worry if you cannot touch your head to your knees. The important thing is that you attain the deepest possible exhalation. This is mainly achieved by contracting the abdominal muscles. The purpose of leaning forwards in paschimottanasana is only to achieve even greater expulsion of air from the lungs. This sitting position has two main advantages:

- It can be practised in shallow water (even less than eight centimetres)
- It can be easily and comfortably practised by almost everyone.

Choose whichever asana suits your body and available facilities.

Suction and vacuum

The method of sucking water (or air) into the anus is difficult to describe. In order to understand it you must try it for yourself. The method is as follows:

Exhale deeply. Hold your breath.

Gently open the anal sphincters with your fingers.

Do madhyama nauli².

Then, while retaining your breath and madhyama nauli, try to expand and pull up the abdomen.

This process creates a vacuum and sucks in water. As you draw in water, gently manipulate the anal muscles so that there is free flow through the anus. Some people can do this technique the first time; others require a lot of practice. It is very easy when you know how. If you have trouble sucking in water, then you are probably doing something incorrectly. You should contact a local yoga teacher who will be able to quickly point out your mistakes. If necessary, see a personal demonstration; this will be far more useful than one hundred pages of descriptions.

BASTI (YOGIC ENEMA)

The method is exactly the same for both jala (water) and sthala (air) basti. The only difference is that jala basti is practised in water and sthala basti in air. The full practice is divided into four stages as follows:

Stage 1: initial suction and evacuation

Sit or stand in one of the suggested asanas. Place your hands near the anus.

Exhale deeply by contracting the abdominal muscles and doing uddiyana bandha. Hold your breath. Gently pull the anal sphincters apart. Do madhyama nauli.

Create a vacuum inside the colon as described under the previous heading.

Suck in water (or air) through the anus.

As you suck in you should carefully manipulate the anal sphincter so that there is free flow.

Suck in as much water (or air) as possible.

Then release the suction and relax; the anal sphincters should be slightly contracted in order to retain the water (or air) inside the bowels.

Breathe out, but maintain the water inside the colon.

Hold the water inside for a short duration while breathing normally.

Then expel the water (or air) and stool into a nearby toilet.

Suck in more water and again evacuate the stool-water mixture.

Repeat the process until most of the stool has been evacuated.

Then proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: progressive suction

In this stage a greater amount of water (or air) is drawn into the colon in order to bring about the best possible wash. The method is the same as stage 1 except that water (or air) is progressively drawn in with successive practice of madhyama nauli. The method is as follows: Take the same body pose as stage 1.

Suck in water (or air) in the same manner as described for stage 1.

When you have drawn in the maximum amount of water release madhyama nauli and breathe out. Hold the water inside by slightly tightening the anal sphincters.

Let your breathing and heart rate return to normal.

Then breathe out deeply again.

Do madhyama nauli and suck in more water (or air).

Draw in as much water as you can.

Then relax madhyama nauli and breathe out. Retain the water inside.

Breathe normally for a short duration.

Then again repeat madhyama nauli and draw in more water.

Relax and breathe out. Retain the water inside.

Repeat the process until the colon is as full as possible.

Then proceed directly to stage 3.

Stage 3: rotational nauli

The technique of rotational nauli (stage 2 of nauli) should be integrated with basti².

If you cannot do rotational nauli then you can practise either agnisar kriya⁸, uddiyana bandha⁵, bhasrika pranayama⁴ or madhyama nauli². In these alternative practices the abdominal muscles should be rhythmically contracted and relaxed.

Rotational nauli is the preferred practice. The method of stage 3 is as follows:

Stand up and hold the water (or air) inside the colon.

Do 1 or 2 rounds of rotational nauli both clockwise and anticlockwise.

This practice will loosen up stool encrustations on the intestinal walls.

Proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: evacuation

Evacuate the water (or air) and stool mixture into a toilet.

Then do mayurasana or hamsasana⁹.

These two asanas exert pressure on the colon and ensure full evacuation.

They also stimulate intestinal peristalsis.

Again go to the toilet and empty the bowels.

If the water is dirty then the whole process, stages 1 to 4, can be repeated.

This is the complete practice of basti – jala and sthala.

Retention of water

If you have the time then the water can be retained inside the colon for a period of time. This should be done after completing stage 2 before starting stage 3. Hold the water inside for as long as you can, perhaps 5 or 10 minutes. This will help to further remove stool that has encrusted on the intestinal walls.

Number of rounds

If you have time repeat stages 1 to 4 until the evacuated water is perfectly clean.

Water and air basti compared

Water basti is a better practice than air basti since it thoroughly scrubs the intestinal walls. Air basti does not clean the walls of the bowels;

rather it helps to stimulate intestinal peristalsis in order to remove accumulated stool. Both are very useful for constipation.

Air basti has the advantage that it can be practised anywhere without preparation (apart from ensuring a nearby toilet). If you have constipation we advise you to practise it every day while in the latrine. If you have more time available, then do water basti as it is a better alternative.

Time of practice

Both water and air basti can be practised at any time, but not after food (because of nauli). The best time is early in the morning before breakfast.

If you intend to go on a fast then we suggest that you practise basti beforehand. This will clean out the bowels and allow the fasting to bring about maximum purification of the body.

Frequency

Sthala (air) basti can be practised as often as you wish. There is no limitation. Jala (water) basti on the other hand should only be practised when necessary. For general cleanliness of the bowels once a week is sufficient. If you have constipation, however, it can be used every few days. Water basti should not become a daily habit. It is natural for the colon to contain a certain amount of stool. It is in this stool that bacteria grows, which is necessary for maintaining general health of the body. Excessive use of basti will interfere with this process of bacterial growth, also it will tend to irritate the large intestinal lining (mucosal).

Actually the daily use of basti or any other form of enema is absolutely not necessary. Many people think that their colon has to be perfectly clean. They develop a neurosis if they do not go to the toilet every morning. For this reason they resort to the daily use of an enema or laxative. Try to avoid this drastic measure and do not worry if you cannot go to the latrine every day.

Limitations

Basti should not be practised by anyone with:

- high blood pressure
- hernia
- any serious digestive ailment

Basti is useful in treating ailments such as colitis and dysentery; however, in some cases

it may be too drastic. If you suffer from these type of disorders you should seek expert guidance.

Benefits

Basti is the best method of cleansing the bowels. Many people feel that a large number of ailments originate in the colon, especially from impurities and malfunction. Actually we do not fully accept this idea, for we feel that most ailments arise in the mind, but certainly a congested colon or excessive toxins in the bowels can help to initiate ailments. Of this there is little doubt. Therefore, basti is a great help in reducing the occurrence of various types of disease as well as improving general health.

Basti is a direct method of tackling constipation. If the constipation is very bad then basti should be preceded by moola shodhana¹⁰. This practice will remove hard stool. Water basti can then be used to thoroughly clean the bowels.

If you have piles then you should also try water basti, but with a little care. Use cold water as this will stimulate the blood flow. You will gain instantaneous relief.

If you suffer from pruritis (itchiness of the anus) then you may find basti gives some relief.

Basti will stimulate the nerves of the colon as well as the nerves connecting other parts and organs of the digestive system. It will also improve muscle tone and blood supply. Old stool and gas are removed. The blood is purified. We suggest that you practise basti and master it. Then you can use it occasionally for general health or to treat specific ailments such as constipation. Try it . . . you have nothing to lose and much to gain.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Nauli: Stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3;
Stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 3

⁴ Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 4

⁵ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

⁶ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

⁷ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

⁸ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

⁹ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 4

¹⁰ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

Most asanas can be easily categorized into specific groups such as backward bending, forward bending, spinal twist, balancing and so forth. However, some asanas don't fit into any obvious category.

1. Gomukhasana
2. Dhanurakarshanasana
3. Baka dhyanasana

These three asanas are well worth practising for they have distinctive benefits.

GOMUKHASANA (COW'S FACE POSE)

In Sanskrit *gomukha* means 'cow's face'. This asana is so called because it resembles the face of a contented cow. At first this may not seem obvious, but in time you will find that the final pose does in fact seem to evoke some similarity with a cow's face. It seems to be more of a symbolic rather than an actual resemblance.

Scriptural references

In the *Gheranda Samhita* it says: "Place your legs on the ground so that the two feet are on either side of the back. Keep the body straight and steady so that it looks like the head of a cow. This is called gomukhasana." (2:17)

This is a very incomplete description, and a person would not be able to practise gomukhasana without further details.

The same description, equally incomplete, is given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

Sitting position

The sitting position for gomukhasana is veerasana (hero's pose). This is a meditative asana¹. The right leg can be folded above the left or the left above the right; it does not matter.

Technique

Sit in veerasana with the right leg folded over the left leg. Make sure that the right knee is located directly above the left knee.



Hold the back straight.

Raise the right arm and place the hand over the shoulder.

Place the left arm and hand behind the back. Try to grasp the left hand with the right hand behind the back; at first you may find this difficult, but with practise it becomes very easy. The back of the left hand should lie in contact with the spine, while the palm of the right hand should point towards the spine.

Join the fingers of the two hands.

Hold the spine erect.

Raise the head so that it faces forwards.

Close the eyes.

This is the final pose and is shown in the above figure. Stay in the final pose for a minute or so. Then release the hands and straighten the legs.

Now the asana must be repeated in the opposite direction.

Fold the left leg on top of the right leg in veerasana.

Raise the left arm and place the hand over the left shoulder.

Place the right arm behind the back.

Try to join the two hands.

Straighten the back and hold the head upright. Close the eyes and remain in the final pose for the same length of time as the other side.

Breathing

The breathing should be normal in the final pose. If you wish you can practise ujjayi pranayama².

Awareness

Be aware of the breathing in the final pose.

Duration

You can practise gomukhasana for as long as you wish; there is no limit. At least a minute or two in each direction is recommended.

Sequence

Gomukhasana can be practised at any place and at any time. It can be done at any stage in your asana practice program.

Benefits

Gomukhasana is an excellent asana for inducing relaxation. If you feel tired, tense or worried then we strongly suggest that you practise gomukhasana for at least ten minutes. It helps to greatly ease away tension. For this reason, it has been found very useful for helping to relieve ailments such as diabetes, high blood pressure and sexual malfunctions.

Gomukhasana directly helps to remove stiffness in the spine, neck and shoulders. It also develops the chest and improves breathing.

DHANURAKARSHANASANA (ARCHER'S POSE)

The word *dhanu* means 'bow' and *akarshana* means 'to draw' or 'to pull back'. Therefore, in English this asana can be translated as 'the pose of drawing the bow'. Dhanurakarshanasana emulates an archer pulling back an arrow in a bow immediately before shooting towards the chosen target.

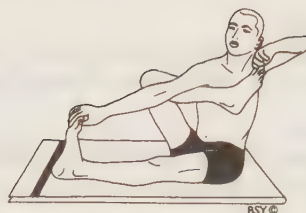
Scriptural references

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* mentioned dhanurakarshanasana under another name: "Hold one of the toes with the opposite hand and pull it towards the ear like a bow. This is called dhanurasana." (1:25)

Generally dhanurasana is the name given to another asana³. The above verse is an incomplete description of dhanurakarshanasana.

Technique

Sit with the two legs straight in front. Straighten the arms and cross them with the right arm uppermost. Grasp the big toe of the right foot with the



fingers of the left hand.

Grasp the big toe of the left foot with the fingers of the right hand.

Pull the right foot under the right arm.

Place the right foot on the left thigh.

Keep the left leg and right arm straight.

Hold the spine and head upright.

Breathe in deeply.

Hold the breath and pull the right big toe towards the left ear; this action resembles the drawing of the bow and arrow.

This is the final pose and is illustrated above.

Hold the right big toe as near as possible to the left ear while retaining the breath.

Try not to bend the head and spine forwards.

Then replace the right leg on the left thigh.

Breathe out.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do a few more rounds.

Then straighten the legs and release the hands. Now the asana has to be repeated in the opposite direction.

Cross the arms with the left arm uppermost.

Grasp each big toe with the fingers of the opposite hand.

Pull the left leg under the left arm and place the left foot on the right thigh.

Breathe in and while holding the breath pull the left big toe towards the right ear.

Remain in this final pose while retaining the breath.

Then replace the left foot on the right thigh.

Breathe out then repeat a few more rounds.

Breathing

Inhale before pulling the big toe towards the ear, with the foot resting on the thigh. Retain the breath while drawing the foot backwards, remaining in the final pose and while returning the foot to the thigh. Exhale at the end of each round.

Awareness

Fix your awareness on breathing and on applying maximum pull on the foot.

Duration

You can do as many rounds as you wish. We suggest about five rounds with each leg.

Sequence

This asana can be done at any stage in your asana practice program and at any time during the day.

Method of grasping the big toe

The foot has to be firmly pulled backwards in the final pose. Therefore, the fingers must tightly grasp the big toe. The best method is to wrap the second (index) finger around the big toe to form a loop. The loop should be closed with the thumb.

Benefits

This is an excellent asana for loosening up the leg joints and strengthening the arms. It also helps to remove back and neck ache. It has been found useful in treating hydrocele.

BAKA DHYANASANA (PATIENT CRANE POSE)

The word *baka* means 'crane' and *dhyana* means 'meditation'. The crane is a long-legged bird that can be seen standing in the shallow water of rivers. The crane seems to be asleep, but as soon as an unsuspecting fish comes within its range, it pounces. The crane is calm and yet very alert and epitomizes the state of meditation.

Baka dhyanasana is named after the reflective nature of the crane. Also the final position of the asana vaguely resembles a bird, the two arms being the bird's legs, the two feet the bird's tail and the head imitating the crane looking downwards into the water for fish. In English, the asana can be called 'the pose of the meditative crane'.

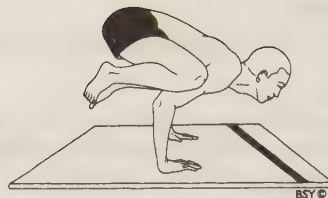
Technique

Squat on the floor with the feet apart.

Balance on tiptoes.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor directly in front of the feet with the fingers pointing forwards; the elbows should be bent outwards.

Adjust the position of the knees so that they rest against the outside top surface of the upper arms as close as possible to the armpit.



Slowly lean forwards.

Lift the feet off the floor so that the whole body is supported on the hands and arms.

Keep the knees firmly in contact with the upper arms.

Bring the two feet together.

Raise the head upwards as far as is comfortable.

This is the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable length of time.

Then slowly lower the feet to the ground.

If you have time repeat the practice.

Breathing

In the final pose one can either hold the breath or breathe slowly and deeply.

Awareness

Be aware of maintaining balance.

Duration

The asana can be done for as long as you have time available. We suggest two or three minutes, whether remaining in the final pose or intermittently raising and lowering the feet.

Benefits

Baka dhyanasana develops the sense of balance and induces mental steadiness. It strengthens the arm muscles.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 4

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 5)

A *muni* is described in the yogic scriptures as a person who has attained the state of inner silence. He is a wise man who has explored the depths of his being. He has made his mind perfectly silent so that it becomes an untarnished reflector of consciousness. His mind has been harmonized and harnessed so that it becomes the key to higher consciousness. This is the boon of a silent mind.

In order to induce inner silence many sincere sadhakas practise mouna – a vow of silence. They reduce interaction with external events. It can be practised in the form of anusthana (for a fixed period of time) for a day, a week, a year or even a lifetime. During mouna, perception and interrelation with the outside world are reduced to the bare minimum or even cut off completely. Generally it is practised in the form of no speaking while carrying on normal life. Sometimes a sadhaka will retire to a cave or room for a few years and totally cut off contact with society and other people. This induces perception of the mind processes.

We do not suggest that you go to a cave, since this will probably cause more harm than good. Nor do we suggest that you practise mouna as a permanent part of your lifestyle; it is too difficult to work and carry out one's responsibilities without speaking. But we do strongly advise you to practise mouna occasionally – perhaps for a day or so. This will help you to calm the mind and become more aware of the inner realms. Also it will make you aware of how much energy each of us wastes in talking too much. Tell your family and friends beforehand so that they know your intentions; if you do not then they may think you have lost your voice or have gone a little crazy through too many yoga practices! The best time to practise is at weekends.

Many people who practise antar mouna find that in the beginning a lot of strong negative emotions and thoughts (*samskaras*) arise. Because they occur so intensely and rapidly

they can make you very unhappy for a period of time. This is a necessary part of the process of purging the mind, but it should be done more slowly, therefore we suggest that you practise for no more than a day or so at first. The duration of mouna can be increased as your mind becomes more harmonized.

During the practice of mouna, besides not speaking, you should try to become indifferent to and unaffected by external activities. Try to be detached and feel as though you are alone – *ekaki* (by oneself). If you stop talking but still remain avidly concerned with the outer world then you will gain little from the practice. Your interaction with the world will merely flow out through the sense organs of eyes, ears, etc., instead of the mouth. You will remain as extroverted as ever. Therefore, try to remain detached from things around you. In this manner, mouna will help you to become more aware of what is happening in your mind. This is essential on the path of self-knowledge.

The practice of mouna that we have just described briefly is concerned with inducing prolonged inner silence. The practice of antar mouna that we have been describing is concerned with inducing the same state, but it is practised for shorter periods of time¹.

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 5 THOUGHTLESSNESS

The aim of this stage is to induce a state of thoughtlessness. In Sanskrit it is called *nirvichara awastha*. The mind must be emptied of all thoughts. Every thought that arises on the screen of consciousness should be immediately rejected. They should be eliminated. You have to refuse to think of anything. The mind has to become perfectly blank, but while you watch with alertness and without sleep.

This stage leads to the state of antar mouna – inner silence, where all thoughts stop. There is a mental vacuum.

Preparation

This stage requires little effort; it should arise almost spontaneously as a result of perfecting the previous four stages. Therefore, we do not suggest that you start this stage until you have fully practised stages 1 to 4¹.

Technique

Sit comfortably with eyes closed.

For a few minutes practise stage 4.

Then become aware only of chidakasha – the inner space of consciousness in front of the closed eyes.

This is the screen of your psyche.

Watch carefully.

If any thought arises, immediately dispose of it . . . reject it.

Be alert.

Do not brood over any thought; as soon as a thought, any thought, arises get rid of it.

More than likely you will see thoughts in the form of visions; weird and wonderful shapes will arise in the chidakasha.

These visions must also be wiped out.

You should try to merge these forms and visions with the formless background of chidakasha; make them fade away.

Your whole aim should be directed towards attaining and maintaining a state of no thoughts and no visions.

No thought or vision should be allowed to manifest itself.

If you wish you can make a resolve:

‘I will not think’ . . . this can be your only thought.

Go on repeating this resolve until only the strong resolve ‘I will not think’ remains.

Then eventually this resolve must also disappear so that you are aware only of the chidakasha.

This is the state of thoughtlessness.

You may feel as though you are soaring through different levels of your mind.

Be alert and aware.

Do not sleep.

When you can attain a state of thoughtlessness then you are ready to begin dharana – concentration on a psychic symbol.

Suppression of thoughts

In this stage, thoughts should be completely suppressed. This may seem to contradict what we have said in previous stages, such as stage 2,

where we urged you not to suppress thoughts under any circumstances. However, in the earlier stages, thoughts were likely to be quite compelling, in which case suppression would cause more harm than good. They had to be exhausted by allowing them to arise without hindrance or suppression. On reaching stage 5, however, the thoughts in the mind should be greatly attenuated and almost insignificant. Therefore, they can be suppressed in order to extinguish minor thought agitation in the mind and to bring about the state of inner silence. Here suppression is justified. But of course, this assumes that you have perfected the previous four stages. Therefore, we again emphasize that you should not start this stage 5 until you have practised and mastered the previous stages¹.

Readiness for stage 6

When you can easily remain in a state of thoughtlessness, then you should proceed to stage 6. Do not continue with stage 5 for you will merely lapse into a state of laya (unconsciousness or sleep). You will have a nice deep sleep, but it will not take you anywhere on the yogic path. Therefore, proceed to stage 6 as soon as your mind is in a thought-free state².

Notes

¹ Antar mouna: Stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5; Stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5; Stage 3 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5; Stage 4 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 5

² Antar mouna: Stage 6 – Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 6

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have described maha bheda mudra. You should master it and add it to your daily kriya yoga practice.

Try basti if you have spare time and the necessary facilities, and especially if you suffer from constipation.

You can proceed to antar mouna, stage 5 – thoughtlessness – if you have practised the previous stages for a reasonable duration.

We have described three asanas in this lesson: gomukhasana, dhanurakarshanasana, baka dhyanasana. Try to practise one or more of them in your spare time.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	6
Shavasana	3
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Antar Mouna:	
Stage 4	5
Stage 5	10
	120

Program 2: duration 1½ hours

All the kriyas from Vipareeta Karani Mudra (1) to Maha Bheda Mudra (7).

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sirshasana	4
Tadasana	1
Gomukhasana	4
Antar Mouna:	
Stage 2	7
Stage 3	7
Stage 4	7
Stage 5	11
	60

Lesson 31

Impart knowledge of yoga,
This is the best form of charity
Because it removes ignorance
And all sorts of sufferings.
Provide medicine for the sick,
This is the second best form of charity.
Give food to the hungry,
This is the third best form of charity.

—*Swami Satyananda Saraswati*

Psychic Symbol

Sleep and loss of awareness are the biggest problems in meditative practice. This state of unawareness is called *laya* in yogic scriptures. It is the chasm that has to be crossed in order to jump from the stage of normal perception to that which is beyond . . . the transcendental. In Hindu scriptures this barrier is often called the 'river of death'. It is also called *baitarni nadi*, the river which Yama, the Lord of Death, crosses and takes people to after they die. This is symbolic and the word 'death' here has a special meaning. It means the death or removal of external sense perception, thoughts and unawareness. This river is that which separates normal states of consciousness from higher states. In order to know the experience of *dhyana* one must be capable of crossing this river. One must die to mundane experience. The best method is to adopt and use a psychic symbol.

The importance of a psychic symbol is, and has been, known in all mystical and religious systems throughout the world. This is the reason that there are so many deities, mantras, etc. They are all intended as a point on which the mind can be fixed to induce meditation. This is why idol worship is so widespread in the world. It is intended, though few realize it, to act as a focal point for concentration of the mind.

In the following discussion we will outline the significance and use of psychic symbols.

The barrier of unawareness

Every meditative practice uses something that the mind can grasp, on which it can take hold. It can be the breath, it can be a mantra. In *nada yoga* both gross and subtle sound is the object of awareness. In *kriya yoga* the object of awareness is a combination of breath, psychic passages, chakras, sound and so forth. In *ajapa japa* it is breath and mantra. Always one's awareness is fixed on an object or process. This is done for a good reason, namely that the mind naturally and automatically moulds

itself around objects of perception. In day to day life it does this continuously with various external objects and thoughts. It is the nature of the mind to form itself, pattern itself around something. Without an object of perception, one lapses into a state of unconsciousness. This also applies to meditative practices: the mind must be patterned into some form, whether it is breath, sound or whatever. If you do not do this then you will only fall asleep, gaining little from your practice.

Many people sit for meditation without fixing their attention on a specific object. They merely close their eyes and allow their mind to wander here and there like a wild monkey. They either brood about their problems or eventually fall asleep. Each of these states is far away from a meaningful meditative experience. One can practise like this for the next hundred years and gain absolutely nothing. There is a man who goes to the park every morning to practise meditation. He sits in perfect *padmasana* and begins to practise. Within five minutes his head slowly drops, his chin rests against his chest and he falls into a deep sleep. He stays in this 'state of meditation' for the next hour. Then at exactly six o'clock some sixth sense tells him that it is time to return home. He wakes up, yawns, unfolds his legs and finishes his practice. He is sincere, but because he does not fix his attention on an object during his practice, he falls asleep every day without fail and gains nothing.

Do not make this same mistake. Try to maintain continuous awareness of an object, breath or whatever in your meditative practice. Do not lose contact or you will fall asleep.

As one progresses along the path of yoga, this tendency to sleep seems to intensify. As your grosser problems are exhausted so you become more relaxed. The natural thing is to sleep. This is the barrier of unawareness, the hurdle that seems to be impassable. This barrier of *laya* is that which prevents people

diving deep into their being. It can be crossed only when you are ready and the method is to adopt and start using a psychic symbol. This is emphasized in many yogic scriptures and we are also emphasizing it here.

The protective screen

Actually this tendency towards laya is a safety mechanism. It prevents people prematurely delving into their minds and too quickly confronting subconscious fears, apparitions, neuroses, etc. This confrontation must occur in the path of yoga, but it should be slow. The mind has to be gradually purified and harmonized over a period of time. If there is sudden perception of a mighty flood of subconscious fears, then one will be overwhelmed by the negative contents of one's own mind. The laya is a protective screen. Only when much of the negativity has been exhausted from the mind can this protective screen of laya be crossed. Then the psychic symbol should be used.

The parable of the crow

It was the monsoon period. There was incessant rain and tumultuous winds. A crow was asleep at the top of a big tree beside a large river. During the night the wind was so strong that the tree was uprooted. It fell into the fast flowing river and was swept away. The crow, however, remained fast asleep. After some hours the tree was swept out to sea.

The wind subsided and the sun shone brightly. The crow awoke and decided to investigate its surroundings. All it could see was water. In all directions there was nothing but a vast expanse of shimmering water. It wanted to find dry land, but did not know in which direction to fly. Finally it decided to fly east. It did not encounter land so it then went west for an hour or so. Still it did not discover land, so it decided to fly south. It flew south, then north but still could not find any signs of land. Then it felt very tired, but suddenly realized that there was no place where it could rest. All it could see was water. The crow immediately thought of the tree. But where was it? Instead of looking for land, it now desperately began to search for the tree from which it had started. After some time and effort it eventually sighted the tree.

The crow was an intelligent bird: it learnt from previous mistakes and experiences.

Therefore, when it again felt strong enough to continue the search for land, it carefully remembered the location of the tree. It flew south and found no land, therefore it returned to the tree and rested. Then it flew in other directions, always with full knowledge of the position of the tree. Eventually, it sighted land. With a whoop of joy, it flew to the safety of the land and forgot the tree. The tree had served its purpose and was no longer necessary.

This story indicates the path that every sincere and serious sadhaka or yogic practitioner must tread. The crow represents the sadhaka practising meditation techniques. The ocean is the mind. The tree is the psychic symbol. The land is meditation. At first the crow tried to find land haphazardly without maintaining awareness of the position of the tree. It nearly got lost in the expanse of the ocean. In the same way, if a person tries to explore the mind without the help of a psychic symbol, then he will only become hopelessly lost – in a state of unconsciousness.

So be like the wise crow; choose a symbol that will help you to find your bearings if you lose your way. In order to reach the dry land of your being – that which is limitless, beyond time and space – use a psychic symbol as a guide.

The Ishavasya Upanishad

Large numbers of yogic-tantric scriptures proclaim the importance of a psychic symbol in meditative practice. Probably the briefest and profoundest explanation is given in the *Ishavasya Upanishad*. In slokas 9, 10 and 11 it emphasizes the importance of balancing ida and pingala, and the importance of karma and dhyana yoga. These three verses and their implications are described in our previous discussion – 'The Balance of Life'. The next three slokas 12, 13 and 14 are concerned directly with the use of a psychic symbol. The first relevant sloka can be translated as follows: "Those who worship the unmanifest reality enter into blinding darkness; those who worship the manifest enter into even greater darkness", (sloka 12) This verse has many meanings; we will confine our discussion to its implications regarding laya and the psychic symbol.

The sloka explains that there are two types of meditative practices. These are as follows:

1. *Sakara* (form) where one's awareness is fixed on a definite focal point or object. This is described by the term 'worship of the manifest' in the sloka. The object can be anything: the breath, a chakra, your deity, mantra, guru, anything. In fact, you can use any object that you can see both in the outer world and the inner world. The object can be a psychic symbol. Included in this group are practices such as kriya yoga, nada yoga, ajapa japa, japa and so forth.

2. *Nirakara* (formless) where one does not fix awareness at any definite focal point. In the sloka it is referred to as 'worship of the unmanifest'. It includes practices where one reflects on such abstract concepts as infinity, eternity, etc. It also includes those practices where awareness is allowed to freely explore the mind and psyche. One may encounter vast numbers of psychic visions.

How is it that both of these types of practices lead to darkness (ignorance and delusion)? If this is the case, what is the point of doing any type of meditative practice? The reason is that both sakara and nirakara meditation practices are means to an end. They are not the end in themselves. So those people who think that the meditative practices, whether on the manifest or unmanifest, are the experience, are deluded. Therefore, the upanishad explains that both methods can lead to ignorance. They must be practised, but as a means to something else. This point will become clearer as you read further.

Meditative practice on one form (sakara) can easily degenerate into mere idol worship. This has happened throughout history in every part of the world. People have worshipped idols and deities without the slightest idea of the implications behind their worship. The same tendency can arise when one tries to fix one's awareness on one object in meditative practice, though possibly at a less obvious level. That is, one may use a deity, mantra, psychic symbol, etc. and start to build up intellectual concepts about it. The symbol will become an object of intellectual speculation and superstition instead of being the means to transcendence. It is this point that the upanishad is trying to explain when it says: "those who worship the manifest enter into even greater darkness." The purpose of fixing one's awareness (worshipping) on one object is to go

beyond the limitations inherent in the object, to something much greater. The purpose of the object is to lead to that which is beyond intellectual concepts.

Sloka 12 says: "Those who worship the unmanifest reality enter into blinding darkness." This refers to nirakara meditative practice. Many people recommend reflection on abstract concepts as being the best type of meditative practice. They say that one should reflect on reality as being beyond the mundane world of sense experience, but if one's level of perception and understanding is gross, then this type of meditative practice is a complete waste of time. Meditative practices on such themes as 'infinity', 'Brahman', etc. tend to degenerate into intellectual speculations not based on deep experience. This leads away from the path towards meditation. Thus the upanishad says if one does nirakara practices prematurely, then one will miss the straight and narrow path. This type of meditative practice has its place, but when a person's perception is very subtle.

This type of practice has to be in accordance with the nature and level of the individual understanding. This will be further explained shortly.

Nirakara meditation practices done prematurely lead to laya (unconsciousness and sleep). One is unable to penetrate the deeper layers of one's being. Thus the rishis who wrote the upanishad warn us to be careful, for this laya leads directly into the deep pit of delusion. First of all there must be intense sakara meditative practice in order to purify the mind, make it one-pointed, and develop the level of perception and understanding.

It should be noted here that practices such as antar mouna have their place in exhausting gross mental impressions in the earlier stages of yogic practice. It should be practised before both sakara (with symbol) and nirakara (abstract) meditative techniques.

Both sakara and nirakara practices lead to different experiences. This is explained in the subsequent sloka: "Meditation on the manifest (sakara) brings a specific experience; meditation on the unmanifest (nirakara) leads to a different experience. This is what the wise have told us." (sloka 13)

The upanishad indicates that sakara meditative practice leads to a specific level of

understanding and experience, while nirakara meditative practice leads to a different level of understanding. Both of them have their place in expanding consciousness as the next sloka explains: "He who knows that both the manifest (formed) and the unmanifest (formless) are really one overcomes death through the manifest (sakara) and obtains immortality through the unmanifest (nirakara)". (sloka 14)

This sloka indicates the purpose of all mystical and religious systems: perfect oneness – integration of the infinite with the individual. It indicates that one should eventually see the formless in all forms, and all forms in the formless. One should see consciousness in matter and matter in consciousness. But this understanding can only come after intense sadhana and the gradual awakening of wisdom through experience. It comes after the practice of sakara and nirakara meditative practices. It is the state that is described in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "When one sees eternity in things that pass away, unseparated yet separated, then one has pure knowledge." (v. 18:20)

Sloka 14 above indicates the order and means to be used on the path to wisdom:

1. One should adopt and use a psychic symbol or any other focal point for awareness (the manifest). Continuous practise of this type of meditation will eventually enable you to 'overcome death'. That is, it will lead you across the river of death – the barrier of unconsciousness. This will lead to perception of the deeper reality of one's being.
2. Then, having obtained this insight, there should be reflection and identification with the formless, the unmanifest (nirakara). Actually, this reflection will arise spontaneously – there will be no choice. Only at this time, not before, should there be reflection on those abstractions which are beyond intellectual understanding.

Eventually there will arise the unification of both the manifest and the unmanifest. The sloka says: "... both the manifest and the unmanifest are really one." That is, one will realize that, in the highest sense, the formed (manifest) and the formless (unmanifest) are actually one and the same. This state of consciousness is called 'immortality' in sloka 14.

You, the reader of this book, are almost certain to be at the stage of sakara. Do not,

therefore, do nirakara practices; you will only be led into laya. Firmly fix your awareness on a chosen focal point prescribed by the meditative practice that you are doing. After some time when you gain reasonable mental purity and one-pointedness, you can adopt and use a more subtle psychic symbol. This will take you deeper into your being. Leave abstract meditations for the future. Follow the wise words of the ancient rishis.

Choice of a symbol

There is a limitless number of psychic symbols. You can choose almost anything, but eventually you should use only one. This has been summed up very beautifully as follows: "All the visible universe is the Buddha (consciousness); so are all sounds. Hold on to one principle (one symbol) and all others are identical." (Huang Po)

Anything can be used as a point of concentration . . . a deity, a mantra, a yantra, chakra, saint, yogi, your guru, a flower . . . even your little finger. You can use absolutely anything that captures your whole attention. All these symbols lead to the same point. Ramakrishna, the great bhakta (devotee) even experimented with different symbols. He practised continuous awareness of Shakti, then Christ and so forth. He emphasized that they lead to the same experience and realization. Any symbol can be used, but there must be continuous awareness.

Certain psychic symbols, however, have been used for hundreds and thousands of years. They have been intimately associated with and used by religious and mystical groups. As such they have been invested with power. They have been firmly impressed on the collective unconscious mind, thus they have great inherent power to awaken changes in one's level of awareness. Some of these symbols are as follows: shivalingam², the mantra and symbol Aum³, a cross, yin and yang symbol⁴, a lotus, a rose and so on⁵. Though you can use anything as a psychic symbol a traditional symbol is highly recommended.

The biggest problem is choosing a symbol that suits your nature, a symbol that you can spontaneously identify with. If you already have a symbol, perhaps an *ishia* (personal deity), then there is no problem. If you do not have any specific symbol then you will obtain it in either of two ways:

1. You will receive it from your guru either in formal *diksha* (initiation) or at a more subtle level.
2. It will spontaneously manifest itself when your perception and sensitivity become heightened. That is, you will get your psychic symbol when you are sufficiently receptive and ready.

In the second case you have to practise yoga, aspire, purify your mind and wait for the symbol to manifest itself. One thing is certain: when your symbol arises from your psyche and shows itself to you, there will be an explosion in your being. There will be no doubt about the identity of the symbol. It will overwhelm you. It may be a symbol that is widely known and used or maybe not; an integral part of the traditions of the society in which you live or something that seems completely alien . . . it does not matter. That symbol which explodes into your field of perception is your symbol. It will be the boat which will ferry you across the wide and normally impassable river of unconsciousness. It is the form that will convey your perception deeper into your being, into the deepest dimensions of your consciousness.

Visualization

In preliminary practices of yoga the symbol can be an external object. Eventually, however, as your perception becomes more subtle, you should visualize your symbol internally. You should create an image in *chidakasha*, the mind-screen in front of the closed eyes. This inner image is more subtle and will take you much deeper⁶.

Most people have trouble maintaining a clear image of their symbol. Either they cannot visualize it or the image tends to fade away. Do not become frustrated, this is merely an indication of the state of your mind. It is difficult to visualize inner images with a disturbed mind; you will be able to think about it but not see it. As your mind becomes calmer you will find it progressively easier to visualize your symbol. When your mind is silent, perhaps after doing *antar mouna* stage 5, then you will be able to maintain a fixed inner vision of your psychic symbol⁷. This leads directly to *dharana* and *dhyana*, but time is required. Do not expect this to arise overnight. Regular practise for many months and years is necessary.

Summary

When your mind is calm you should start to use a psychic symbol. You must formulate a pattern of consciousness which acts as a base on which you can fix your awareness. This is essential if you want to make headway in meditative practice. When an astronaut explores space, he always relates his position to the earth or the sun. It is the same with the exploration of inner space. One must relate one's awareness to a symbol. One must firmly anchor one's attention on a psychic symbol in the same way that a barnacle attaches itself to the bottom of a ship, or a leech that fixes itself to your skin. Your awareness, which normally drifts from one thought to another, must be centred around one form. All the different parts of your being have to be integrated. All the mental forces must be moulded around a symbol. When you can maintain unceasing awareness of that one symbol for a few minutes without displacement by other thoughts, then you will be launched into the state of meditation.

When choosing your symbol, bear the following points in mind:

- Your symbol can be external or internal. However, as your perception becomes more refined you should use a subtle inner psychic symbol.
- Your symbol should be such that your mind automatically identifies with it. That is, the symbol should attract and hold your attention without too much effort.
- Do not change your symbol. If you change it, then the mind will have to adapt to and mould itself around a new symbol. This takes time and effort.
- Try to develop the ability to clearly visualize a sharp image of the symbol in front of the closed eyes. With practise it should arise spontaneously.
- If you do not have a specific symbol, then practise meditative techniques like *ajapa*, *japa* etc. where there is mantra and breath awareness⁸. When you are ready you will obtain a symbol.

The psychic symbol in kriya yoga

Kriya yoga is an all encompassing system. It leads the practitioner through perception of progressively more subtle layers of the mind. In the earlier *kriyas* (practices), one is aware

of more gross focal points of attention such as chakra trigger points, breathing and so forth. In the later kriyas, to be introduced towards the end of this course, awareness is fixed on more subtle inner focal points represented by symbols of the chakras. Then, in the final stages, one fixes awareness on the lingam. You do not have to choose any symbol; the final symbol arises spontaneously as an integral part of the structure of kriya yoga. This final symbol, the lingam, leads directly to dhyana.

Notes

¹ The Balance of Life: Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1.

² Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 5

⁴ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1

⁵ For a full list of more commonly used psychic symbols refer to: Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6

⁶ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 5

⁷ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4

⁸ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 5

Hints for Kriya Yoga Practice

The following are suggestions that may help to improve your practice of kriya yoga:

Asanas: if you have time, try to include a few asanas before your kriya yoga practice. A good program is to do surya namaskara¹, shavasana², bhujangasana³, ardha padma paschimottanasana⁴ and ardha matsyendrasana⁵. These systematically loosen the whole body and can be done in less than twenty minutes. If necessary you can also practise the half butterfly⁶. If you do not have the time then it is not necessary to practise these asanas. Just make sure that you keep your body healthy by taking some exercise every day.

Aum chanting: chant Aum three times immediately before starting your kriya practices; that is, before vipareeta karani mudra.

Wash: if you feel drowsy during your practice then splash some cold water on your face. It is also a good idea to take a cold wash or bath before the practice.

Chankramanam: if you feel stiff and/or tired then it is well worth spending a few minutes doing chankramanam⁷. The kriyas are in a fixed sequence. If this sequence is broken and the mind allowed to wander, then you will lose the benefits. Chankramanam is a method of temporarily breaking the sequence, without losing awareness. Do chankramanam when and if you feel stiff.

If you do not feel discomfort then there is no need to stop your practice of kriya yoga; omit chankramanam. After practising chankramanam for a few minutes, return to your kriya practice and continue the practices where you left off.

Sequence: every time you practise kriya yoga you must start from the beginning. It is no good doing the first three kriyas one day, the next three kriyas on the following day etc. Also do not reduce the number of rounds in each kriya in order to complete more of the practices. Do as many complete kriyas as possible according to time available. It is better

to do four kriyas fully than to practise, say, only five rounds of ten kriyas.

Talking: try to avoid talking and contact with other people immediately after completing your practice program. Practise mouna (no talking) for one hour⁸. In this way you will be able to watch the mind, feel the shanti (calmness) and the benefits will carry into the rest of the day.

Sensitivity: after intense practise you may find that you are very sensitive . . . sensitive to the emotional blasts, negativity, psychic explosions and feelings of others. Be careful not to get bowled over. Try to remain detached.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

² Shavasana: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;
Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

⁵ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 4

⁶ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3

⁷ Topic 4 of this lesson

⁸ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4

Kriya Yoga Practice

KRIYA 8: MANDUKI MUDRA (FROG ATTITUDE)

The word *manduki* means 'frog' and *mudra* means 'psychic attitude'. This kriya is therefore known as 'the frog psychic attitude'. In figure 1 of the accompanying picture we have shown the traditional sitting pose of this kriya. If you use a little imagination you will see that it does resemble the sitting position of a frog.

This practice is also widely called *manduki kriya*.

Scriptural references

In the *Bhagavad Gita* it says: "Let him (the sadhaka) hold his body, head and neck erect and motionless and gaze at the nosetip without looking elsewhere." (v. 6:13)

This verse describes both *nasikagra drishti* and *manduki mudra*, since they are very similar. The purpose of the practise is to make the mind one-pointed, calm and receptive.

Manduki mudra is mentioned in the *Gheranda Samhita* (v. 3:57-58); and also in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (v. 1:53) under the name 'bhadrāsana'.

The art of nose tip gazing

The purpose of gazing at the tip of the nose is to calm the disturbances and fluctuations of the mind and to balance *ida* and *pingala* creating harmony between extroversion and introversion. This is exquisitely and lucidly described in the Chinese scriptures called *Tai Chin Hua Tzung Chih* translated by Wilhelm: "What then is really meant by this? The expression 'tip of the nose' is very cleverly chosen. The nose must serve the eyes as a guideline. If one is not guided by the nose either one opens the eyes too wide and looks into the distance so that the nose is not seen, or the lids shut too much so that the eyes are not seen. But when the eyes are opened too wide, one makes the mistake

of directing them outwards, thereby one is easily distracted (by outer events). If they are closed too much, one makes the mistake of letting them turn inwards, thereby one easily sinks into a dreamy reverie (lost in thoughts; unawareness). Only when the eyelids are lowered properly, halfway, is the tip of the nose seen in just the right way. Therefore, it is taken as a guideline . . ."

Thus there is great significance and reason behind nose tip gazing. It balances the *ida* and *pingala* nadis and leads to the awakening of *sushumna*, leading directly to meditation if it is perfected: this is the reason for nose tip gazing in *manduki mudra*.

In Sanskrit, nose tip gazing is called *nasikagra drishti* or *agochari mudra*¹.

Sitting position

The sitting pose for *manduki mudra* is called *bhadrāsana* (the gentleman's pose). There are three variations as follows:

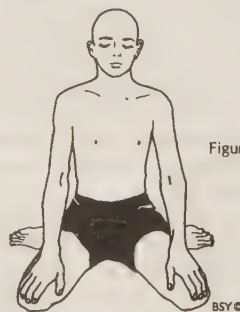


Figure 1

1. *Traditional method*: this is a difficult practice, to be done only by those with very flexible legs. It is also known as *manduki asana*. The method is as follows:
Sit in *vajrasana*².

Place the feet so that they point in opposite directions and away from the body (see figure 1). Separate the knees as far as possible without strain.

Let the buttocks rest firmly on the floor. Place the hands on the knees, palms downwards. Hold the spine and head upright. This is the final pose.

2. *Alternative method:* this method is much easier and is more widely used by people who practise kriya yoga. The technique is the same as method 1 except that the feet point towards each other with the soles facing upwards. The buttocks should rest on the floor. This method is illustrated in figure 2 and 3.

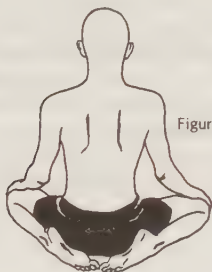


Figure 2

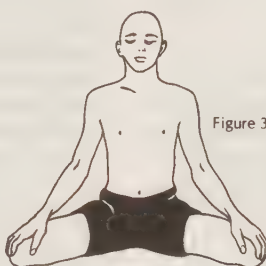


Figure 3



Figure 4

3. *Method for beginners:* most people will find that both methods 1 and 2 are too difficult. In this case a blanket should be folded a number of times and placed under the buttocks (see figure 4). This will apply a firm pressure in the region of mooladhara chakra.

Choose any of the above methods according to the flexibility of your legs and preference. The important thing is that the mooladhara chakra trigger point is pressed by either the floor or the top of the blanket.

Technique

Sit in bhadrasana.

Ensure that the buttocks are firmly in contact with the floor (or the top of the folded blanket). Hold the back and head erect.

Relax the arms.

Open the eyes.

Do nasikagra drishti¹.

Be aware of the natural flow of breath through the nostrils.

You must imagine that the flow of breath in each nostril meets at the eyebrow centre; that is, the flow of breath follows a conical or V-shaped pathway.

As you inhale the flow of breath in the two nostrils merge with each other at eyebrow centre.

As you exhale the two flows diverge from the eyebrow centre and move outwards through the nose.

Be completely aware of this flow of breath which alternately converges and then diverges. Feel it.

Simultaneously be aware of smell, all smells.

At this stage of kriya yoga practice your senses, including the sense of smell, should be very sensitive.

The aim is to try to smell the astral body; it has a subtle fragrance that some describe as being similar to the pervading aroma of sandalwood. Continue to be aware of both the flow of breath and the sense of smell. If your eyes become tired then relax them for a minute or so before again doing nasikagra drishti.

Continue the practice until you feel bliss.

Do not become lost in the practice, since there is much more of the journey ahead; this bliss is merely a pleasant distraction.

When you feel some bliss then proceed directly to the next kriya.

Breathing

Breathing should be slow and deep.

Awareness

You should be aware of both the breathing process and smell.

Duration

There is no fixed duration for this practice. It should be done until you experience a feeling of bliss, but don't wait expectantly for 12 hours. You must use your discretion. A reasonable practice duration is from 5 to 10 minutes.

Sequence

Manduki mudra should be done immediately after maha bheda mudra³ and before tadan kriya.

Position of eyes

The eyes should be focussed on the tip of the nose. If this is done correctly then the end of your nose will appear like a lingam. Fix your attention on this nose lingam.

Remember also that the eyes should be neither wide open nor completely closed. They must be half open, which is the same as saying that they should be half closed.

Light

This kriya cannot be practised in darkness; it has to be practised in mild light, so that one can see the end of the nose. All the kriyas after manduki mudra can be done either in darkness or in mild light, depending on your preference.

Mooladhara chakra and smell

There is a definite relationship between the sense of smell and the mooladhara chakra. This is clearly stated in various yogic scriptures and one can also experience it for oneself. During the previous 7 kriyas mooladhara chakra has been gradually stimulated. This heightens one's sense of smell. One becomes aware of very subtle smells.

KRIYA 9: TADAN KRIYA (BEATING THE KUNDALINI)

The word *tadan* means 'beating' and *kriya* means 'technique'. Therefore, a direct translation is 'the beating technique'. A more descriptive name is 'beating the kundalini'.

This is a very simple yet powerful kriya. It brings almost instant bliss, but it must be practised in the correct sequence of kriya yoga.

This is the last of the kriyas that are intended to induce pratyahara (sense withdrawal); the next group of kriyas are intended to induce dharana (mental one-pointedness).

Scriptural references

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* describes tadan kriya but under the name of *maha vedha* as follows: "Just as a beautiful woman is useless without a man, so also are maha bandha and maha mudra fruitless without maha vedha

(tadan kriya). The sadhaka should sit in the maha bandha pose (padmasana) and do pooraka (inhalation) with a concentrated mind. The breath should be retained inside while doing jalandhara bandha. Placing both palms on the ground on each side of the body, the sadhaka should slowly raise himself off the ground. The buttocks should be gently beaten on the ground. By this practice, prana will enter the sushumna. The ida, pingala and sushumna become united; this leads to freedom. The body becomes like a corpse. At this stage inhalation should be recontinued. This practice bestows many siddhis (psychic powers), prevents old age, removes wrinkles and prevents white hair. It is a practice that is highly respected by the sages." (v. 3:25–29)

This is a reasonable description of tadan kriya, except that it is called by a different name and the technique used in kriya yoga does not use jalandhara bandha. The details given are still insufficient for a person to practise by himself.

Sitting position

To do this kriya you must sit in padmasana⁴. There is no good alternative sitting position. People who cannot sit in padmasana can sit with their legs stretched out in front of the body; this, however, is nowhere near as effective.

Hand position

Throughout the practice the hands should rest firmly on the floor on both sides of the buttocks. There are two alternatives:

1. Palms flat on the floor, fingers pointing forwards.
2. Fists on the floor with knuckles downwards.

In the accompanying picture we have shown only alternative 1, but you can experiment and find the method that you like best. Both are equally good.

Technique

The practice can be arbitrarily divided into four stages:

Stage 1: starting pose

Sit in padmasana (if you cannot sit in padmasana sit with both legs stretched out in front) Place the hands on the floor besides the buttocks.

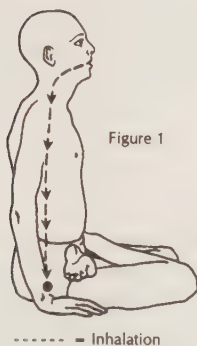


Figure 1

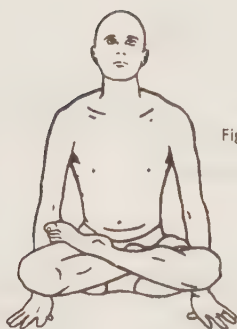


Figure 2

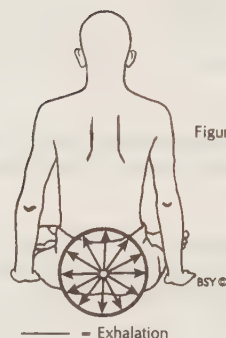


Figure 3

The arms should be straight, but relaxed.
Open the eyes.
Bend your head back slightly.
This is the starting position (shown in figure 1).

Stage 2: inhalation

Practise shambhavi mudra⁵; maintain this throughout the practice.
Open your mouth slightly.
Inhale slowly and deeply through your mouth with ujjayi pranayama⁶.

Imagine that there is a tube running down the centre of your body connecting the mouth to mooladhara chakra.

As you inhale imagine that your breath is being drawn down through this inner tube.

The breath accumulates and builds up pressure at mooladhara.

This process is shown in figure 1.

At the end of inhalation proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: beating the buttocks

Hold your breath.

Fix awareness at the mooladhara chakra.

Practise a mild form of moola bandha; that is a slight contraction of mooladhara.

Straighten your arms and lift your buttocks and whole body off the ground (see figure 2).

Beat the buttocks on the floor.

Raise and drop the body by bending and straightening the arms.

Beginners should only beat the buttocks 3 times; this can be slowly increased up to a maximum of 11 times.

This beating should not be harsh.

Throughout, the awareness should be fixed at mooladhara.

Then proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: diffusion

After a number of beatings sit on the floor.

Release moola bandha.

Relax the whole body.

Exhale through the nose with ujjayi pranayama. Feel the breath and prana diffuse in all directions from mooladhara chakra (see figure 3).

This is the end of 1 round (stages 1–4).

Do 7 rounds.

Warning

Do not beat the buttocks too hard on the floor; if you do then you may injure yourself. Do not let the coccyx bone (tailbone at the bottom of the spine) land directly on the floor. The buttocks and the back of the folded legs should hit the floor at the same time. This will cushion and distribute the force of the fall over a wider area.

Breathing

Inhalation and exhalation should be done with ujjayi. Inhale while drawing prana down to mooladhara (figure 1). Hold the breath while beating the buttocks (figure 2). Exhale while feeling the diffusion of prana from mooladhara (figure 3). If you wish you can breathe in and out once between each round.

Awareness

You should be aware of breath, eyebrow centre (in shambhavi mudra), physical movement and the accumulation and diffusion of prana at the mooladhara chakra.

Number of beatings

You have to hold your breath while beating the buttocks. Beginners should beat their

buttocks only 3 times. Add 1 more beating every few days to a maximum of 11 full beatings.

Duration

The practice takes about 1 minute per round. Therefore, the complete duration is about 7 minutes.

Sequence

Tadan kriya should be done after manduki mudra and before naumukhi⁷.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5

³ Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 5

⁶ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁷ Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 1

Chankramanam

Chankramanam is a simple technique which is very useful for those people who are doing intense and prolonged practice of kriya yoga. It is a method of loosening up the body while maintaining one-pointedness of mind. If you experience extreme stiffness and discomfort during your practice we suggest you try it.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *chankramanam* means 'wandering, 'roaming about'. Within both the Sanskrit word and its English translation there is an inference of effortlessness, of roaming here and there without specific intentions and plans, and this is the essence of the practice.

In yogic terminology there are two very meaningful words: *bahir mukhi* and *antar mukhi*. *Bahir mukhi* means 'facing outwards' and it refers to the state of extroversion where one is predominantly concerned with outer activities. In a wider sense, however, it also implies absorption in one's thought processes. According to yoga, even thoughts are external to the inner being. Therefore, *bahir mukhi* refers to both the state of extroversion and introversion. This is the mundane level of awareness of day to day life.

Antar mukhi means 'facing inwards' and refers to the path that leads to higher states of consciousness. It is the *sushumna* path of awareness where one is poised midway between extroversion and introversion and yet beyond both. It refers to the path of transcendence. The aim of chankramanam is to tread this path.

Chankramanam is a walking *sadhana* (practice) without effort and without distraction by either the inner thoughts or the external environment. It can be defined as walking *japa*. It is intended to induce and maintain a state of *antar mukhi* while moving the body.

Tradition and usage

Chankramanam has been practised by mystics since time immemorial. Many yogis have been

renowned for roaming here and there, wherever their feet took them, like leaves blown in the breeze. Many ancient scriptures describe sages who maintained awareness only by their mantra and physical movements. They practised chankramanam all day, when they moved from place to place, when they preached and when they went from house to house to get *bhiksha* (alms). They were aware of every movement, everything that they were doing.

When Ramana Maharshi went to get *bhiksha*, he never lifted his eyes until he returned. He never looked at anyone, but maintained the vacant look of *shoonya drishti* (absorption in his own self). He never even looked at those who gave him food. His awareness was in the state of *antar mukhi*. He used to tell his disciples: "In one breath I returned, with one mind I returned and with one awareness I returned."

Very few people could understand him. It means he was practising chankramanam.

Buddhist and Christian monks practise modified forms of chankramanam as part of their *sadhana*. During prolonged periods of collective prayer and meditative practice, for example, a bell will sound. The whole congregation will file into a garden, courtyard or into a large hall and do chankramanam for a fixed period of time. Afterwards they will again sit down and continue their prayers or meditation. Sufis also practise forms of chankramanam.

Chankramanam has been practised throughout the world. The method is simple but difficult to perfect; the benefits are profound.

Purpose

Chankramanam has a number of purposes:

Loosens up the body. During meditative practice the body becomes very stiff and painful. Chankramanam is a method of removing this stiffness and the accompanying aches and pains.

Revitalizes the body. After a prolonged period of sitting, the blood circulation tends to become sluggish and the blood stagnates in

various parts of the body. Chankramanam reactivates the blood flow, helping to maintain health of the numerous organs and functions of the body such as digestion, respiration, etc.

Removes sleepiness. The increased blood supply wakes up the brain removing drowsiness.

Removes introversion. In meditative practice it is very easy to become introverted and to become lost in one's compulsive thoughts. Chankramanam helps to reduce and prevent excessive introversion without going to the other extreme of extroversion. It brings a balance between these two extremes so that one perches on the razor's edge between them.

Develops awareness of the present. Awareness of one's movements and mantra reduces the tendency to brood about the past or dream about the future.

Chankramanam is useful if you start to yawn during your daily meditative program. It helps to bring greater benefits when you again continue your practice. In fact, those sadhakas who sit in one position for hours and hours should definitely practise chankramanam in order to maintain good health.

CHANKRAMANAM

Start walking. You can either walk in a circle or to and fro according to space available.

You can walk slowly or quickly, but it should be comfortable and rhythmical.

Imagine that the body is moving by itself like a clockwork toy.

Your head should lean forwards so that you are looking in the direction of your feet.

You should look but not see; the eyelids should be lowered, not looking at anything specifically.

The eyes should be vacant; if you wish you can focus on the space between the nosetip and the ground.

Start to chant a mantra. If you have your own mantra then use that; if not use Aum.

You can practise either upanshu japa (whispering japa with movement of lips) or manasik japa (mental pronunciation)¹.

Synchronize your chanting with the movement of your feet.

As you move your right foot forwards chant your mantra once.

As you move the left leg forwards again chant the mantra.

Continue in this manner with awareness of the

physical movement and the mantra. People are very rarely aware of their movements; how often have you walked to the bathroom without awareness of your movement? Be aware! Continuous awareness of your mantra with every step.

Try to imagine, to feel that you are outside watching the body moving automatically; feel that it is separate from yourself.

If you start to get lost in thoughts and forget your mantra, do not worry; but immediately bring your awareness back to the mantra and try to maintain this awareness.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

Awareness

Are you aware of what you are doing? When you are eating, are you aware of it, or is it just mechanical? Cows in the field eat and eat all day, but they do not know they are eating. There is no self-awareness. If you are eating, know that you are eating. Be aware of every morsel, the taste, the satisfaction or dissatisfaction. This awareness must be developed in everything that you do, whether cleaning the toilets, working, playing, gardening or during meditative practice. Use chankramanam as a means to help awaken this awareness.

Duration

Chankramanam can be practised for as long as you wish, but for the purposes of meditative practice and kriya yoga we suggest five to ten minutes or until stiffness is removed.

When and where

It can be done at any time and any place when you are walking. If done for loosening the body during meditative practice, then do it when you feel stiff. It is best done in a garden or open ground. If this is not convenient or if you live on the top floor of a block of flats, then practise in the open space of a room.

Integration with kriya yoga

If you are serious about your practice of kriya yoga, then we suggest that you begin to practise chankramanam at a suitable intermediate stage in your program.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

Asanas: Practice

There are a number of asanas that are performed in padmasana, some of which we have already described. The following are five more main asanas belonging to this group.

1. Gupta padmasana
2. Lolasana
3. Parvatasana
4. Garbhasana
5. Kukkutasana

Needless to say, these asanas can only be practised by those people who can sit in padmasana¹.

GUPTA PADMASANA (HIDDEN LOTUS POSE)

The word *gupta* means 'hidden'. In English it is normally called 'the hidden lotus pose'. It is so called because the feet are hidden under the body in the final pose.



Technique

Sit in padmasana.

Using your arms, raise the body so that it is supported on the two knees.

Then slowly lean forwards and rest the chest flat on the ground.

Place the two palms together behind the back. Rest the chin or one cheek on the ground, whichever is most comfortable.

This is the final pose.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Breathing and awareness

Normal breathing in the final pose.

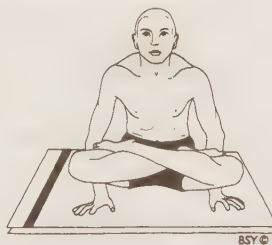
Pay attention to the breathing and relaxation of the whole body in the final pose.

Benefits

This asana further loosens up the legs, so that you will be able to sit in padmasana for longer periods of time. It helps to correct postural defects in the spine. With practice it can even be used as a relaxation asana.

LOLASANA (SWINGING POSE)

The word *lola* means 'to swing'. Therefore, this asana is called 'the swinging pose'.



Technique

Sit in padmasana. Place the palms on the floor on either side of the buttocks.

Breathe in deeply.

Raise the buttocks and legs from the ground using the support of the arms as shown in the above picture. Then swing the body backwards and forwards while balancing on both arms. Continue this swinging movement for as long as you can hold your breath. Then again lower the buttocks and legs to the ground.

Breathing and awareness

Inhale before lifting the body. Hold the breath while raising and swinging the body to and fro. Exhale on returning to the ground. Breathe normally a number of times before repeating the practice. Pay attention to physical movement and breathing.

Number of rounds

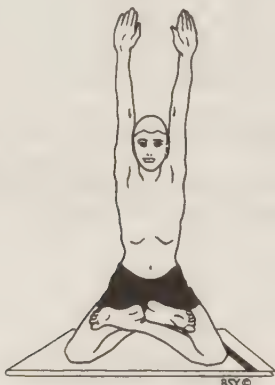
Do as many rounds as you have time available. Five rounds is a reasonable number.

Benefits

Strengthens the abdominal and arm muscles. It is an excellent preparatory practice for *tadan kriya*².

PADMA PARVATASANA (LOTUS MOUNTAIN POSE)

The word *parvat* means 'mountain' and *padma* means lotus. Therefore, this asana is called 'the lotus mountain pose'. It is a balancing asana.



Technique

This is a difficult asana, therefore you can if you wish practise in front of a wall. Sit in *padmasana*¹.

Using the arms for support, slowly raise the buttocks off the ground so that the weight of the body is entirely on the knees.

Slowly straighten the spine and make the back and legs vertical; remember you can use the support of a wall if you want.

Fix your gaze on a point on the wall directly in front of the eyes.

Raise one arm upwards, maintaining balance with the other arm.

Then when you feel ready try to raise the other arm upwards. The final pose is shown.

If you lose balance try to fall forwards and immediately take support of the wall with the arms; if you fall backwards, quickly place the hands on the floor to reduce the impact of the fall.

Breathing and awareness

Normal breathing throughout the practice.

Fix your attention on maintaining balance and on a fixed point on the wall.

Perfection

If you can do this asana in front of a wall, then you can try it in the middle of an open space.

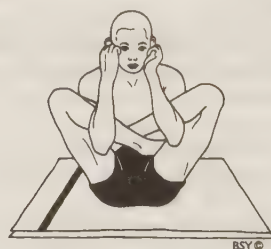
Benefits

Develops sense of balance and helps to reduce nervous tension.

GARBHA PINDASANA (FOETUS IN THE WOMB POSE)

The word *garbha* means 'womb' and *pindasana* means foetus, so this asana is literally called 'the foetus in the womb pose'.

This asana can only be done by those people who can easily sit in *padmasana* and who have slim legs and arms.



Technique

Sit in *padmasana*.

Slowly slide the two arms between the calf and thigh of each leg. This insertion is easier if the arms and legs are wet or oiled.

Insert the arms until you can bend them at the elbows under the calves.

Fold the arms upwards and raise the legs.

Place the hands behind or on the side of the head.

Simultaneously maintain balance of the body so that only the bottom of the spine rests on the floor; this is much easier than it looks.

This is the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for as long as you feel comfortable.

If you wish you can close the eyes.

Then lower the arms and legs.

Release the arms from the legs.

Easier method of inserting the arms

Even people with slim and flexible legs will find it difficult to insert the arms between the folded legs.

An easier method is as follows:

Sit with the legs straight in front of the body.

Fold one leg so that the foot rests on the opposite thigh.

Insert the arm on the same side of the body between the thigh and calf; at this stage it should be comparatively easy.

The elbow should be placed so that it is behind the knee of the folded leg.

Then carefully fold the other leg and adjust the foot so that it rests on the opposite thigh behind the previously folded arm; this may need a little manipulation, but it can be done with practice.

Then insert the other arm between the calf and thigh of the folded leg on the same side. From this position the asana can be done very easily.

Breathing and awareness

Breathe normally throughout the entire practice. Pay attention to attaining the final pose and maintaining balance.

Benefits

If you can do this asana you will find it very useful in calming the mind and soothing away anger and tension. It develops the sense of balance.

KUKKUTASANA (COCKEREL POSE)

The Sanskrit word *kukkut* means 'cockerel'; therefore, this asana can be called 'the cockerel pose'. It is so called because it resembles a cockerel in the final pose, the two arms representing its two legs.

Scriptural references

The *Gheranda Samhita* states: "Sit in padmasana. Push the arms through the crevices between the thigh and calf muscles. Place the palms on the ground and raise the body off the ground like a raised platform." (v. 2:31)

Technique

Sit in padmasana.

Insert the arms between the folded legs as already described for garbhasana; if you wish you can adopt the easier method of inserting the arms. Place the palms flat on the ground in front of the buttocks.

Push forwards and raise the body so that it is balanced on the two arms; this requires practice.

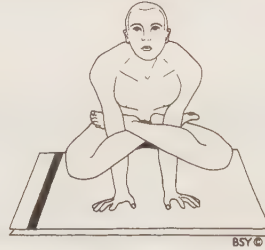
Hold the back straight.

This is the final pose.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable time.

Then return to the ground.

Slowly release the arms from the legs.



Breathing and awareness

Normal breathing throughout the practice. Pay attention to attaining the final pose and maintaining balance.

Benefits

Loosens up the legs, strengthens the arms and develops the sense of balance.

General comments

We do not expect you to practise all these asanas every day. We have given them for reference purposes and so that you can try them when you have time and when your body is sufficiently flexible.

We have already previously described a few asanas which are also done from padmasana. They are:

1. Yoga mudra³
2. Baddha padmasana³
3. Matsyasana⁴
4. Padma mayurasana⁵

These all belong to the same group and give many benefits. Try them. But do not break any bones by prematurely forcing stiff legs into padmasana. Slowly loosen the legs by doing leg loosening exercises, such as the half butterfly etc.⁶

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

² Topic 3 of this lesson

³ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

⁵ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 4

⁶ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 3 and Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 4

Meditation: Antar Mouna (Stage 6)

We have described five stages of antar mouna over the last five lessons. If you have reached stage 5: inducing thoughtlessness, then you should begin to practise stage 6: the use of a psychic symbol¹. This will act as a focal point for your awareness and will induce one-pointedness of mind. Without this symbol you will not progress further in antar mouna; instead you will experience some calmness and a good sleep. You will not be able to contact deeper levels of your being.

A full explanation of the psychic symbol and its implications is given in this lesson².

ANTAR MOUNA – STAGE 6 PSYCHIC SYMBOL AWARENESS

Many people attempt concentration prematurely. Because of this they have little or no success in their practices. First of all the mind must be harmonized to a reasonable, level. Then one must induce pratyahara (sense dissociation). Both of these are induced through regular practise of antar mouna stages 1–5 over a period of time. When you have attained the thoughtless state of stage 5 then the mind has to be moulded so that it patterns itself into the form of a symbol. That is stage 6 – dharana (concentration on an inner psychic symbol).

Technique

Very little explanation is needed, only regular practise and perseverance.

Practise stage 5 to induce thoughtlessness.

Then create an inner image of your psychic symbol.

Fix all your attention on the symbol. If it fades away, bring it back. There should be constant awareness of your psychic symbol.

Try not to get side-tracked by psychic scenery; if these images are strong let them arise but while maintaining awareness of the symbol.

If the images are not overwhelming, crush them and fix all your attention on the symbol.

You should be resolute, do not develop interest in any experiences that arise . . . only awareness of your psychic symbol.

Do not sleep. If you can maintain a constant stream of awareness towards the symbol, then you will glide into the state of . . . dhyana.

Sleep awareness

It is possible for very advanced sadhakas to maintain a state of sleepless sleep. That is, though sleeping, they maintain complete awareness of their dreams. It is done by using a psychic symbol that has become such a natural part of one's psyche that perception of it can be maintained even during sleep.

The onset of sleep is like descending into a deep well with a rope. One slips and falls into the well . . . one loses awareness and becomes lost in deep sleep. The psychic symbol is a means of descending into sleep without falling into the depths of unconsciousness. If you cannot do this practice, don't worry; it is difficult to maintain awareness in the sleep state.

Antar Mouna in summary

The six stages of antar mouna are as follows:

1. Awareness of sense perceptions³
 2. Awareness of spontaneous thought process⁴
 3. Conscious creation of thoughts⁵
 4. Awareness and disposal of spontaneous thoughts⁶
 5. Thoughtlessness¹
 6. Psychic symbol awareness
- These lead to dharana and then dhyana.

Notes

¹ Antar Mouna, stage 5 – Book III, Lesson 30, Topic 4

² Topic 1 of this lesson

³ Antar Mouna, stage 1 – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 5

⁴ Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 5

⁵ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 5

⁶ Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

Integrate the two new kriyas – manduki mudra and tadan kriya – into your daily practice program. Also bear in mind the suggestions we have given in the topic entitled 'Hints for Kriya Yoga Practice'. If necessary practise chankramanam.

If you have practised stage 5 of antar mouna then you should start to use a psychic symbol

in meditative practice apart from kriya yoga. If you are not ready to use a psychic symbol, then remember what we have said in the discussion for your future practice.

If you have time try one or more of the asanas described in this lesson: lolasana, gupta padmasana, parvatasana, garbhasana and kukkutasana.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours	
Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Chant Aum 3 times	1
Kriya yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Antar Mouna – Stage 6	3
	120

Program 2: Kriya practice only

Do all the kriyas one after the other; approximate duration of the program is 108 minutes, which is very auspicious.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Use the same program as given in lesson 30.

Lesson 32

He who is able to retain the climax becomes master over death and the knower of yoga, because the discharge of bindu brings depression and its consequences, and retention brings vitality, vigour, power, strength and concentration.

The body of the practitioner of vajroli has a nice odour. If the bindu is steady, then where is the fear of death?

The bindu which is controlled by the power of the mind bestows life, therefore, the bindu should be carefully controlled.

—*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:88–91)

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 10: NAUMUKHI MUDRA (CLOSING THE NINE GATES)

The Sanskrit word *navi* means 'nine' and *mukhi* means 'gates'. This kriya can be called 'the mudra of the nine gates'. A more widely used name, however, is 'the closing of the nine gates'.

The first nine kriyas can be classified as techniques of pratyahara (sense withdrawal). Naumukhi is the first in the group of dharana (concentration) techniques. From this stage onwards the mind becomes more and more one-pointed.

Rationale

In the human body there are nine openings or gates through which one perceives all the sense experiences of the outside world. These are: the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, the mouth, the anus and the sexual organ.

There is also a tenth gate, called the *Brahma Dwara* (the Door of Brahma), which leads to mystical or transcendental experience and realization. During mundane, everyday experience this gate is closed – all perception comes through the other nine gates. In naumukhi these nine gates are temporarily closed. This prevents external perception and helps to open up the tenth door.

Subsidiary practices

Naumukhi is made up of the following subsidiary techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama²
2. Khechari mudra²
3. Moola bandha³
4. Vajroli mudra
5. Shanmukhi mudra⁴

Vajroli Mudra

The word *vajroli* is derived from the word *vajra* which has various meanings and implications. In the context of vajroli mudra, vajra can be regarded as the name of a nerve which

connects the sexual organs with the brain. It is also a psychic pathway that is associated with the sushumna pathway⁵. This pathway is directly connected with the unleashing of powerful psychic forces.

There are two types of vajroli mudra – one is concerned with maithuna (sexual intercourse under prescribed conditions) and the other is a simple raja yoga form. It is the latter that is used in kriya yoga.

The technique is as follows:

Sit in any comfortable position.

Place the hands on the knees and relax the whole body.

Try to draw the sexual organs upwards by pulling and tensing the sexual organ and lower abdomen.

This contraction is similar to that which is made when one has the urge to urinate, but has to retain the urine for some time.

The testes in men and the vagina in women, should move slightly due to the contraction. This is the simple form of vajroli mudra.

Its purpose is to convert *retas* (sexual energy) into *ojas* (highly refined pranic or psychic energy). This process is called *urdhva retas* – the sublimation of sexual energy. Prana is the essence of both ojas and retas; vajroli helps to bring about sublimation of the grosser retas into the more refined ojas.

Shanmukhi Mudra

Shanmukhi mudra⁴ can be translated as 'the attitude of the seven gates'. Before attempting naumukhi we suggest that you practise shanmukhi mudra for a few days.

Sitting position

The sitting position for naumukhi mudra is siddhasana for men, and siddha yoni asana for women⁶. These two asanas are most suitable since they apply a constant pressure at the mooladhara chakra trigger point in the area of the perineum.

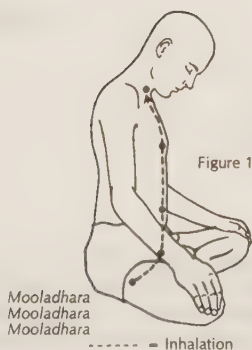


Figure 1

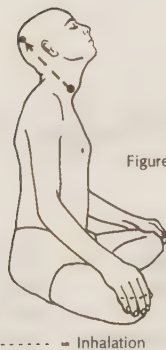


Figure 2

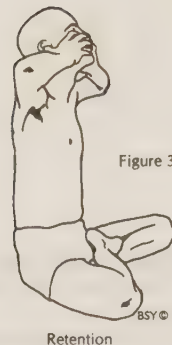


Figure 3

If you cannot sit in one of the above asanas you can choose any other comfortable sitting pose as an alternative. If necessary you can use a cushion.

Technique

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana.

Keep the back straight but relaxed.

Close the eyes and keep them closed throughout the practice.

Do khechari mudra.

Place the hands on the knees and let the arms relax.

Exhale deeply and bend the head forwards slightly as shown in the accompanying figure 1. The first round starts here.

Fix your attention on the mooladhara chakra. Repeat 'mooladhara' mentally 3 times: 'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara' while holding the breath.

Inhale with ujjayi pranayama and simultaneously move your awareness up the arohan (frontal passage) as illustrated in figure 1.

Be aware of each kshetram as you raise your awareness: swadhisthana, manipura, anahata vishuddhi.

Do not say the name mentally – only awareness of each centre.

Raise your head as your awareness passes from vishuddhi to bindu (figure 2).

Inhalation should be completed when your awareness reaches bindu.

Hold the breath.

Raise your head as your awareness passes from the face.

Practise shanmukhi mudra by closing the ears with the thumbs, the eyes with both forefingers, your nostrils with the two middle fingers and the lips with the fourth and fifth fingers (figure

3). Do not apply too much pressure with the fingers – just enough to firmly close each 'gate'. Practise moola bandha, without jalandhara bandha.

Practise vajroli mudra.

At this stage all the gates are closed.

Be aware of the awarohan (spinal passage).

Try to visualize a shining copper *trishul* (trident) in the spine with the root in mooladhara chakra and the 3 prongs extending upwards from vishuddhi chakra (figure 4).

Continue to retain the breath.

The trident will move upwards slightly of its own accord so that the central prong pierces bindu.

As it pierces bindu, mentally pronounce the mantra 'bindu bhedan' (literally: 'bindu piercing') once.

Feel that there is an explosion of the mantra in all directions from bindu (figure 5).

Then the trident will drop downwards again to the starting position shown in figure 4.

Again it will rise; once more pronounce the mantra 'bindu bhedan' as the bindu is pierced. Then it will drop again.

Feel this alternate rising and falling of the trident for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Then release vajroli mudra.

Release moola bandha.

Release the pressure of the fingers and thumbs and lower the hands to the knees.

Exhale with ujjayi pranayama and khechari mudra while simultaneously moving your attention through the centres in the awarohan as follows: bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Be aware of each centre in turn (figure 6) – no mental repetition.

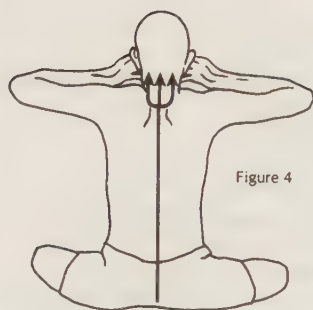


Figure 4

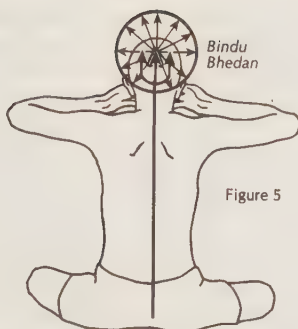


Figure 5

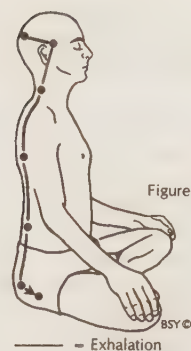


Figure 6

Exhalation should end at mooladhara. Hold the breath. Bend the head slightly forwards. This is the end of the first round. Start the second round immediately. Inhale and let your awareness pass through the centres of the frontal passage and so on. Practise 5 complete rounds.

Breathing

Ujjayi breathing throughout the practice. Hold the breath while repeating the 'mooladhara' mantra. Inhale while ascending the frontal passage. Hold the breath while visualizing the trident and repeating the 'bindu bhedan' mantra. Exhale while descending the spinal passage.

Awareness

Fix awareness on breathing, chakras and kshetrams, the closing of the nine gates, the trident and the 'mooladhara' and 'bindu bhedan' mantras.

Number of rounds

Do 5 rounds. This should take about 5 minutes – a little more, a little less – depending on your control of breath.

Hints

- Most people will find it difficult to complete a round with one respiration. You may feel slight suffocation. In the beginning, it is best that you prematurely break the practice in the middle of the round and breathe in and out. Do not strain.
- Perhaps you can do one complete round with one inhalation and exhalation, but you may still feel discomfort. Under these

circumstances, we suggest that you breathe in once at the end of each round when your awareness reaches mooladhara. As you gain more control over the duration of inhalation, retention and exhalation, then this extra facility can be discarded.

- After breath retention and visualization of the trident you may feel a little discomfort or difficulty in exhalation. The lungs seem to 'lock'. We have found that this problem is overcome by inhaling slightly before exhalation.
- It is extremely important that the back be held perfectly straight all throughout this kriya. If the spine is not straight, the sensation that follows the piercing of bindu will not be perceived.
- It is also important that vajroli mudra be correctly performed, for this too heightens the sensations experienced during this practice. When vajroli mudra is perfected, the contraction of vajra nadi can be achieved without contracting the anal sphincter muscle. The sensation is like an electric current running the full length of vajra nadi to the brain.
- Try to sensitize your awareness to the point where you actually feel the piercing of bindu. The sensation is similar to an electric shock.

KRIYA 11: SHAKTI CHALINI (CONDUCTION OF PRANA)

The word *shakti* means 'energy', 'prana' or 'kundalini'; the word *chalini* means 'to move' or 'to conduct'. This kriya can therefore be called 'the conduction of prana' or 'the awakening of the kundalini'. It is the eleventh kriya,

the second of the dharana (concentration) group of practices and should be practised immediately after naumukhi.

Scriptural references

Shakti chalini is widely mentioned in yogic scriptures. It is well described in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* (verses 107–108), *Gheranda Samhita* (3:44–50) and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (3:104–120). All the descriptions, however, are different; the same name, 'shakti chalini', is used for different techniques. Furthermore, none of these techniques resemble the practice of shakti chalini that is used in kriya yoga. If you are interested, we suggest that you look up these references for yourself. However, we will give a few quotations from the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: "The kundalini is coiled and shaped like a snake. When the shakti moves then there is realization. Of this there is no doubt." (3:108) This verse indicates the importance of awakening the kundalini (shakti) using such methods as shakti chalini. However, there must be mental balance in one's being:

"The *balaraṇḍa* (kundalini) lies midway between the Ganges (ida) and Yamuna (pingala). When it moves one attains the abode of Lord Vishnu (illumination)." (3:109) This verse emphasizes that the kundalini will not awaken unless the ida and pingala are balanced. We suggest that you refer back to our previous discussion "The Balance of Life"⁵. Without this balance the kundalini will never awaken even if you practise shakti chalini or any other yogic technique for the next twenty years.

Subsidiary practices

To practise shakti chalini you should know the following techniques:

1. Khechari mudra²
2. Ujjayi pranayama²
3. Shanmukhi mudra⁴

The position of the fingers and hands for shanmukhi mudra is illustrated in figure 3.

Sitting position

Sit in siddhasana or siddha yoni asana⁶. If you cannot sit in one of these two asanas sit in any other comfortable asana.

You should remain in the same sitting position that you used for naumukhi; there is no need to move one's physical position or to open the eyes.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Hold the back straight.

Close the eyes and keep them closed throughout the entire practice.

Do khechari mudra.

Exhale deeply.

Bend the head forwards.

Fix the awareness at mooladhara chakra.

The first round begins here.

Mentally pronounce the mantra

'mooladhara – mooladhara – mooladhara'.

Then inhale with ujjayi pranayama letting your awareness ascend the frontal (arohan) passage.

You should be aware of each centre in turn as follows: swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi.

There should be a smooth flow of awareness (figure 1) – no mental pronunciation.

Raise your head as the awareness moves from vishuddhi to bindu (figure 2).

Inhalation should cease on reaching bindu.

Hold the breath.

Practise shanmukhi mudra, closing the eyes, ears, nose and lips with the fingers and thumbs (figure 3).

Allow your awareness to rotate in a continuous circle through the avarohan (spinal passage) and the arohan (frontal passage).

Simultaneously try to visualize a thin green snake moving in the same closed loop.

Continue to hold your breath.

The snake should move downwards from bindu to mooladhara in the spinal passage and then upwards from mooladhara to bindu in the frontal passage.

The movement of the snake should be integrated with the movement of your awareness.

The snake should make a complete loop (figure 3).

Visualize the snake as biting its own tail.

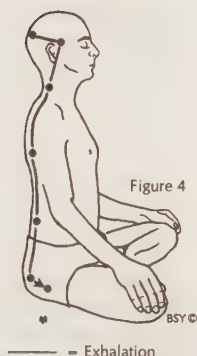
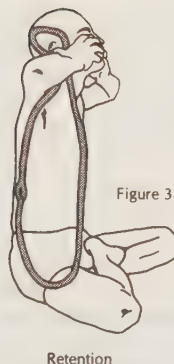
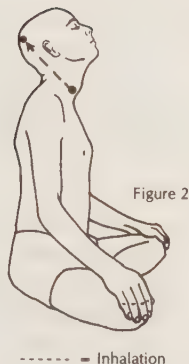
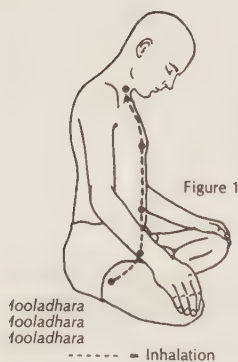
Let the snake move in a continuous circle; if it starts to move on a different track, let it – only watch.

It may appear to spin off away from the avarohan – arohan circuit, let it. Only remain aware.

Continue this visualization for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath, but don't strain.

Then release shanmukhi mudra and place the hands on the knees.

Fix your awareness on bindu.



Exhale with ujjayi while being aware of each centre in the avarohan as follows: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Only be aware of each centre – no mental repetition (figure 4). Exhalation should be terminated when your awareness reaches mooladhara.

Lower your head forwards. This is the end of the first round.

Immediately start the second round.

Mentally repeat the 'mooladhara' mantra 3 times.

Then, with ujjayi inhalation, raise your awareness through the centres of the arohan passage. Do 5 complete rounds.

Breathing

Ujjayi breathing throughout the practice. Hold the breath while repeating the 'mooladhara' mantra. Inhale while ascending the arohan passage. Hold the breath while visualizing the movement of the internal snake. Exhale while descending the avarohan passage.

Hints

When this kriya is mastered then 5 rounds should be the equivalent of 5 complete respirations. In the beginning, however, this is not easy. We suggest that you follow the instructions that we have listed under this heading in the description of the previous kriya, naumukhi mudra.

Awareness

Be aware of the breathing, the centres in the arohan and avarohan, the 'mooladhara' mantra, the physical movement of the head,

the raising and lowering of the hands and the visualization of the psychic snake.

Visualization

If you practise shakti chalini alone, then you may find it difficult to visualize the snake. If, however, you first of all practise the preceding ten kriyas you will find that visualization is much easier. The snake seems to appear naturally. If you cannot visualize the snake, don't worry – with time and practice you will.

Number of rounds

Do 5 rounds. This takes approximately 5 minutes according to your capacity to retain the breath and control exhalation and inhalation.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 31, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁴ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 5

⁵ For further details of the sushumna pathway refer to Balance of Life: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1; Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

⁶ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Hatha Yoga: Vastra Dhauti

Vastra dhauti is a method of cleaning the throat, oesophagus and stomach with a length of cloth. At first you may think that it is more like a circus trick than a yogic technique as it seems unnatural and unsightly. You may feel disinclined to practice it. But it gives many benefits. For this reason we strongly suggest that you try to master it. We specifically recommend *vastra dhauti* for those who suffer from asthma.

Definition

The word *vastra* means 'cloth' and *dhauti* means 'cleansing' or 'washing'. Therefore, *vastra dhauti* is a technique for cleaning the digestive system with cloth.

It is also known by various other names. These include: *vas dhauti* (washing with a cloth), *dhauti kriya* (cleansing technique) and *dhauti karma* (cleaning technique).

Scriptural references

Most traditional texts on hatha yoga mention *vastra dhauti*. The *Gheranda Samhita* says: "Take a long fine cloth which is two inches in length. Swallow it gradually and then take it out again. This is known as *dhauti kriya*." (1:41) "*Vastra dhauti* cures tumour, fever, kidney trouble, leprosy, cough, catarrh and bile trouble. It keeps the body free of disease and strong. It helps to develop the body." (1:42)

It seems that the great yogi Gheranda had a very high regard for *vastra dhauti*.

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: "According to the guru's instructions take a wet cloth four fingers in width and fifteen feet in length. Swallow it and then remove it again. This is known as *dhauti karma*." (2:24) The text continues: "The afflictions of twenty types of diseases such as cough, asthma, leprosy, etc. can be completely removed. Of this there is no doubt." (2:25)

We don't know the specific names of all twenty diseases, but we can vouch for its efficacy in treating asthma.

Type of cloth

The cloth should be soft, unstarched and perfectly clean. It should not be dyed. White muslin is ideal.

Length of cloth

Beginners should cut a length of cloth that is about 2½ cm wide and 3 metres long. When you can do the practise then the width and length can be gradually increased. After a few months the width can be about 5 or 6 cms, and the length about 6½ metres. However, such a long cloth should only be used under expert guidance, and after regular practice with a shorter cloth.

Make sure that all frayed edges and loose thread are removed before starting.

Preparation

The cloth should be placed in a mug or bowl of lukewarm water. If you wish you can use salt water, but it is not essential. This will keep the cloth wet so that it slips smoothly down the oesophagus into the stomach.

Some people soak the cloth in milk, or even sweetened milk. If you find that this makes the cloth more palatable, and the practice easier, then try it.

Sitting pose

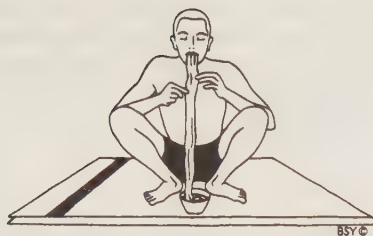
If your legs are reasonably flexible, then sit in a squatting position. Otherwise sit on a low stool or chair. The position is clearly illustrated in the following figure.

VASTRA DHAUTI

Sit in a comfortable position. Place the cup containing the cloth and water on the floor between the two feet. Then start stage 1.

Stage 1: ingestion

Take one end of the cloth, leaving the other end immersed in the water.



Fold the 2 corners of the end of the cloth so that it is slightly pointed; this will allow it to pass more easily down the throat. Place the pointed end of the cloth in the mouth.

With one finger push it towards the back of the tongue.

Hold the cloth with the index (second) finger and the thumb of each hand as shown below. Imagine that the cloth is food, perhaps a long, thick strand of spaghetti.

Chew the cloth thoroughly as though it is food; this will induce copious secretions of saliva so that the cloth can slide into the stomach.

But do not chew the cloth too roughly with the teeth or it will shred and become frayed. Try to swallow the end of the cloth.

If necessary sip some water from the cup.

Feed more of the cloth into the mouth as the end gradually goes down the oesophagus; but do not feed it too quickly or it will bunch up in the mouth and make the practice difficult if not impossible.

Gradually the cloth should slip down the throat.

The first part of the practice is the most difficult; that is, swallowing the cloth from the mouth to the point where the windpipe joins the oesophagus in the throat.

You may start to retch a little; if so, stop for a short period until the spasms cease and then continue to swallow the cloth again.

Remember: you must chew the cloth in order to produce saliva to act as a lubricant; without chewing you will find the practice impossible. Simultaneously you must swallow the cloth. Drink some more water from the cup if it is necessary.

You will find that the practice becomes easy when the end of the cloth has passed the junction of the windpipe and oesophagus; it will slide smoothly into the stomach almost as fast as you can swallow.

Eventually most of the cloth will accumulate in the stomach. Do not swallow the whole cloth; allow at least 30 cms to protrude from the mouth. When you have reached this point proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: churning

Now you must massage and churn the stomach so that the cloth rubs, scrubs and cleans the stomach walls.

Do nauli¹.

Alternatively you can practise agnisar kriya². Beginners should agitate the stomach for no more than 1 minute. Adeptes can practise for up to 3 minutes. Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: withdrawal

Now the cloth must be removed from the stomach.

Hold the free end of the cloth.

Pull the cloth, but do not pull too hard or you may damage the delicate walls of the stomach and the oesophagus.

You should pull gently but firmly.

At first you may feel some resistance to the withdrawal of the cloth; after a few seconds this resistance will disappear and the cloth can be easily extracted.

Let the cloth fall into the cup.

Remove the whole cloth to complete the practice.

Advice for beginners

You are not likely to master vastra dhauti on the first day. It may take a few days or even a few weeks before you are able to swallow the cloth. It is strange but true that the less you try the easier it becomes; the more you relax the more easily the cloth will go down the throat. If you forget that the cloth is a piece of cloth and merely swallow, then the cloth will automatically drop into the stomach. Do not hurry, take your time.

Practise for about ten minutes whether you can swallow the cloth or not. Practise every day. After a few days you will become accustomed to the cloth entering the throat. When your mind accepts the idea then it is a short step to mastering the technique.

Warning

- Do not leave the cloth in the stomach for more than fifteen to twenty minutes,

otherwise it may start to enter the intestinal tract.

- Do not swallow the entire cloth. Leave about thirty centimetres hanging from the mouth.

Reuse of cloth

The same cloth can be used again and again. After the practice, thoroughly wash the cloth, dry it and then store it in a safe, clean place.

Time of practice

Practise when the stomach is empty. The best time is before breakfast.

After completing the practice wait for at least half an hour before eating breakfast. This period will ensure that sufficient mucus has been secreted to protect the linings of the stomach and esophagus.

Regularity

Practise once a week for general health and cleaning of the digestive tract. Practise every day until you master the technique.

Supplementary practices

For the fullest benefits we suggest that you also do kunjal kriya⁵ and jala neti⁴. These should be done after completing vastra dhauti. Vastra dhauti scrapes the impurities from the walls, while kunjal expels the impurities. Jala neti tones up the nasal system.

Benefits

The cloth thoroughly scrubs the stomach walls. It stimulates the digestive juices and the peristalsis. It invigorates the entire body. If you refer to quotations that we have given under the heading 'Scriptural References' you will see that it is recommended for a wide number of ailments. From our experience we have found the practice useful in treating acidity, indigestion, bronchitis and asthma.

Alleviation of asthma

If you suffer from asthma you should do vastra dhauti every day as a preventive and curative measure. It is simple but effective. Many sufferers of asthma have gained much relief using this method.

Asthma is an ailment of the respiratory system – vastra dhauti acts directly on the digestive system. Possibly the swallowing of the cloth activates nerve reflexes in the digestive

tract and brain. These in turn cause a chain reaction, which somehow brings about a relaxation of the congestion in the lungs. One thing we are certain about is that it works

Notes

¹ Nauli: Part 1 – Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 3;

Part 2 – Book III, Lesson 29, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 1

⁴ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

The following two forward bending asanas are advanced asanas that require a reasonable degree of flexibility in the legs and spine.

1. Koormasana

2. Eka pada sirasana

Before attempting them you should master other forward bending asanas such as paschimottanasana¹, janu sirshasana² and ardha padma paschimottanasana². They should not be attempted by beginners.

KOORMASANA (TORTOISE POSE)

The word *koorma* means 'tortoise'. This asana can thus be translated as 'the tortoise pose'. It is so called because it resembles a tortoise in the final position; the back of the body representing the shell, and the arms and legs the four limbs. If you look at the accompanying picture you will see that this is a fair description.

The tortoise symbolizes pratyahara (sense withdrawal). The *Bhagavad Gita* states: "When he (the yogic aspirant) can withdraw his senses from association with the other objects like a tortoise withdraws its limbs from outside danger, then he is firmly fixed on the path towards wisdom". (2:58) Koormasana symbolizes this state of pratyahara; moreover, it can also help to induce this state. That is, the asana can be practised to stabilize the mind and direct awareness inwards away from the external world.

Technique

Proceed slowly through each stage, especially stage 3.

Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the ground with the two legs pointing forwards.

Separate the feet by about half a metre, more if possible.

Bend the legs upwards at the knees.

The two heels should remain in contact with



the floor throughout the whole practice. Keep the eyes open.

Stage 2: leaning forwards

Breathe out deeply.

Lean forward and place the hands under the knees, palms facing either upwards or downwards.

Lean further forwards and slowly slide the arms under the two legs.

You can bend the knees further upwards if necessary.

The arms should slide sideways and backwards until the elbows lie near the back of the knees. Breathe normally for a short time allowing the spine to relax.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: attaining the final pose

During this stage it is important that the spine remains passive; do not tense the back muscles. Breathe out deeply.

Slowly push the heels forward and straighten the legs; simultaneously the body should bend further forwards as you apply leverage on the arms with the legs. Do not strain.

This process should be progressive.

After leaning forwards slightly, breathe in and relax the body.

Then breathe in again and bend a little further forwards, hold your body position and then inhale and relax the whole body.

Repeat this process until your forehead touches or nearly touches the floor between the two legs.

Only bend forward as far as you feel comfortable; don't force or you will injure the spine.

If you are able you can rest your chin on the floor.

Then fold the arms around the back and interlock the fingers of both hands under the buttocks.

This is the final position.

Relax the whole body.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Close the eyes.

Be aware of breathing.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then slowly return to the starting position.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Breathe in as you lean forward. Breathe out as you relax the body. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose.

Be aware of relaxing the spine and synchronizing the breath with the forward bend. In the final pose be aware of breathing.

You can practise koormasana for as long as you wish providing there is no strain.

Time of practice

Do not practise after taking food; wait for at least three hours. The best time is early in the morning, before breakfast, and late in the afternoon, before the evening meal.

Restrictions

People who suffer from the following ailments should not attempt to do koormasana:

- slipped disc
- sciatica
- hernia

You must use your discretion; only practise the asana if you are certain that your spine is sufficiently flexible.

Counterpose

Any backward bending asana can be done immediately before or after koormasana. We suggest bhujangasana³, matsyasana or supta vajrasana⁴.

Benefits

This asana gives the general benefits of other forward bending asanas. It loosens up the vertebrae of the spine and tones the spinal nerves. It massages and improves the functional efficiency of the abdominal organs. It is specifically recommended for relieving

constipation and backache, and for inducing mental relaxation.

EKA PADA SIRASANA (ONE FOOT TO HEAD POSE)

In Sanskrit the word *eka* means 'one', 'single'; *pada* means 'foot' and *sira* means 'head'. The name of this asana can be translated as 'the single foot head pose'. It is so called because one foot is placed behind the head in the final position.

This asana is also called *eka pada sirshasana* where the word *sirsha* means the same as *sira*, that is head.

It may not seem like a forward bending asana from the point of view of the final body position. However, instead of bending the trunk forward onto one leg, the one leg is pulled backwards behind the trunk; this really amounts to the same thing. Because the benefits of this asana are essentially the same as many other forward bending asanas, we have classified it accordingly.

Technique

Do not force any stage, particularly the last.



Stage 1: starting position

Sit on the floor with the two legs straight in front of the body.

Bend the left leg slightly.

Hold the left foot with the right hand, the fingers placed in the region of the ankle, the palm in contact with the outside of the foot. Wrap the fingers of the left hand around the left leg slightly above the ankle; the left arm should be positioned so that the elbow lies between the thigh and the lower leg.

This is the starting position.

Stage 2: raising the leg

Raise the left leg using the two arms and hands. As you raise the leg bend the trunk forwards and twist slightly to the right.

Try to place the left leg on top of the left shoulder. Do not strain.

Proceed to stage 3 if you can place your leg on your shoulder.

Stage 3: attaining the final pose

Release the grip of the left hand.

Place the left arm under the left thigh so that the hand points towards the buttocks.

Raise the left leg higher by using the right arm and by pushing the left thigh to the back with the left arm. Do not strain.

Try to place the left foot behind the head at the nape of the neck.

This should be achieved by bending the head forwards under the calf muscle which then rests on the shoulder.

If you are feeling comfortable, place your hands together in front of the chest.

Try to straighten the spine and hold the head upright.

This is the final pose.

Breathe slowly and deeply. Close the eyes.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable.

Then slowly release the left leg and return to the starting position.

Repeat the same procedure with the right leg.

Breathing and awareness

Normal breathing while moving the body into the final pose. Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Be aware of breathing in the final pose.

Restrictions, duration, time of practice and counterpose

These details are as for *koormasana*.

Benefits

Eka pada sirasana compresses each side of the abdomen in turn. This gives the internal organs a thorough massage and is very useful for removing constipation and stimulating peristalsis. For fullest benefits you should raise the right leg first so that the massage is applied in the same order as the movement of faeces.

Practice of this asana applies a powerful massage to the sexual organs, helping to improve their efficiency and remove malfunctions.

When done regularly, *eka pada sirasana* has been found useful in improving the blood

circulation in the legs and relieving varicose veins.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 2

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

⁴ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

Pranayama: Surya Bheda Pranayama

Surya bheda pranayama is concerned with stimulating and awakening energy within the physical and pranic bodies. The practice can be described as a psychic supercharger. The word *surya* means 'sun' and *bheda* means 'to pierce', 'to awaken'. The sun represents pingala nadi (the pranic pathway associated with energy in the human framework) and the flow of the breath through the right nostril.

There are various alternative methods; we will describe three. You can choose one of these practices according to your preference.

Scriptural references

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states: "The aspirant should sit in a comfortable pose and breathe in through the right nostril until he feels pressure build up to the hairs and fingertips. Then he should exhale through the left nostril." (2:48, 49)

This is one method. We do not suggest that you hold your breath until you feel 'pressure build up to the hairs and fingertips'; hold it only for as long as you feel comfortable. Long retentions should only be done under very strict conditions of practice, perfect health and cleanliness of the body-mind, and under the guidance of a teacher. The scripture gives clear instructions about this in previous verses. The text continues: "Surya bheda pranayama should be practised again and again. It will purify the frontal part of the brain, remove all kinds of wind problems and eradicate bacteria within the body." (2:50)

Surya bheda pranayama is also described in the *Gheranda Samhita*, although the technique is slightly different: "I am going to discuss surya bheda pranayama with kumbhaka (breath retention). Please listen carefully. Inhale air through the surya (right) nostril as deeply as possible. Retain the breath inside. Do jalandhara bandha. Continue to do kumbhaka for as long as you can until sweat starts to come from the tips of the hair and fingers." (5:57, 58)

Again we do not advise you to hold your breath for prolonged periods of time without the personal guidance of a teacher.

The description continues in later verses: "During surya bheda you should feel as if the inhaled breath is ascending from the navel region. You should slowly breathe out through the left nostril. Again inhale through the right nostril, hold the breath, then breathe out through the left nostril. Repeat the process over and over again." (5:65, 66)

This practice is slightly different to that given in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* in that it includes jalandhara bandha and awareness of the upward flow of breath from the navel. The practice that we generally teach in the ashram is also slightly different as you will see when we describe the techniques. All these techniques, however, bring about essentially the same benefits.

Technique 1

This is the method described in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*.

Take a comfortable sitting position.

Hold the spine and head erect but without tension.

Place the hands on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Let the breathing become deeper.

Now start the practice of surya bheda.

Raise your right hand in front of the face in nasagra mudra¹.

Place the index (second) and middle (third) fingers on the forehead with the ring (fourth) finger and thumb on either side of the nose.

Close the left nostril with the ring finger. Inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril. At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils with the ring finger and thumb.

Hold your breath for a comfortable length of time.

Do not strain.

Then release the pressure of the ring finger.

Breathe out slowly through the left nostril.
This is 1 round.
Do as many rounds as available time permits.

Technique 2

This is the method described in the *Gheranda Samhita*.

Sit in a comfortable pose.

Make the preparations described in technique 1.

Then inhale deeply through the right nostril, trying to imagine that the breath is being drawn up from the reservoir of energy in the navel region.

You should feel the inhaled breath recharging the whole body.

Feel that the whole body is expanding.

At the end of inhalation close both nostrils.

Hold the breath and do jalandhara bandha².

After a comfortable period of retention, release jalandhara bandha and raise your head.

Release the pressure of the ring finger and breathe out through the left nostril.

One round is completed at the end of exhalation. Do more rounds.

Technique 3

This is the method that we teach in the ashram. Repeat technique 1 as far as retention of the breath.

Then do both jalandhara bandha² and moola bandha³.

Hold the breath while doing the two bandhas for as long as you feel comfortable.

Then release the two bandhas and raise the head. Breathe out slowly through the right nostril (not the left as given in the previous practices).

At the end of exhalation start the second round. Breathe in through the right nostril, hold the breath, do the bandhas; then release the bandhas and breathe out through the right nostril. Do more rounds.

Awareness

Maintain awareness of breath and the mechanics of the practice.

Duration and time of practice

Surya bheda gives many benefits if done for a prolonged period of time. However, it can cause more harm than good if your body-mind is not sufficiently purified. We therefore

suggest that you practise for no more than twenty minutes at one stretch.

The best time to practise is early in the morning before breakfast. Do not practise after food because you will interfere with the natural energy flow associated with digestion.

Benefits

The three variations seem to be quite different, especially the third technique. But actually they give very similar benefits. They awaken energy in the body and increase vitality; they are especially recommended for those people who are habitually lethargic. The practice should not be done, however, if the lethargy is due to illness. Surya bheda pranayama will help transform *tamas* (lethargy) into *rajas* (dynamism). This will help to make the mind more alert and perceptive, and will be a great help in meditative practice.

Notes

¹ Book I Lesson 3, Topic 4

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

³ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

Daily Practice Program

We suggest four programs: two for kriya yoga practice and two for general yoga practice.

Program 1 is for people who have sufficient time to practise all the kriyas every day; that is, kriyas 1 to 11 that we have so far introduced.

Program 2 is for those who want to do kriya yoga practice but who have limited time. This group should practise as many kriyas as they can, starting from vipareeta karani mudra (kriya 1) and proceeding through the other kriyas in turn. No kriyas should be cut, either partly or wholly. As many should be done as time allows.

Programs 3 and 4 are general yoga practice programs for durations of 1 hour and ½ hour

respectively. They do not contain kriya yoga practices and are for those people who honestly feel that they are not ready for serious practise of kriya yoga. If you are not sure of your readiness then we advise you to read our two previous discussions on kriya yoga practice¹.

In this lesson we have described two new kriyas: naumukhi and shakti chalini. Integrate them into your daily practice if you have time for program 1; otherwise omit them.

Try vastra dhauti, especially if you suffer from asthma, surya bheda pranayama especially if you lack vitality, and koormasana and eka pada sirasana if you are sufficiently flexible in body.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 1 hour 58 minutes – extended kriya practice	
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Kriya 10: Naumukhi Mudra	5
Kriya 11: Shakti Chalini	5
	118

Program 2: shortened kriya practice according to available time. Do as many of the above kriyas given in program 1 as you can starting from no. 1. Do not omit any kriya wholly or partly.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Surya Bheda Pranayama	
(or any pranayama of your choice)	10
Antar Mouna (or any other meditative practice)	20
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana	3
Surya Bheda Pranayama	
(or any pranayama of your choice)	6
	30

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 2
and Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 2

Lesson 33

Intellectual understanding is useful up to a point, but then it can be a hindrance, a barrier to further progress in spiritual life. Faith, love and devotion to God and Guru are the stepping stones, so too are the practice of yoga and service in the cause of yoga.

—Swami Satyananda Saraswati

Satsang

Satsang is the essence of yogic and spiritual life. The word *sat* means 'truth' and *sang* means 'association'. *Satsang*, therefore, means 'association with truth', 'an encounter with truth' or 'association with those who are following the path of truth'. In the highest sense it means direct perception and communion with truth, and even more, living with awareness of truth in every action and incident of life. It means that one's being is submerged in awareness of truth. But this is a very elevated definition; at a more practical level, satsang means sitting in the company of wise men and women and listening to what they have to say. Satsang also means a place where seekers of truth meet in the presence of their guru.

Satsang will bring about conscious and unconscious changes in your being. It will inspire you and bring about changes in your attitudes. It will open up new horizons and vistas; you will start to see new meaning and potential in life. Slowly it can transform your understanding and perception of your own being. Life will start to show new, undreamt of promise.

How can satsang bring about these changes? This is not easy to answer, but we can say that the energy vibrations of a sage function at a more subtle level. These vibrations can change and charge your mind and energy field. His aura will transform your aura. His psychic battery will charge your psychic battery. A sage is a transformer of energy flows. But you must be receptive. Whether you are aware of these changes or not, they will nevertheless occur.

The mind has a tendency to remain in a rut of false beliefs and conditioning; it is also full of knots. You can never remove these by yourself. You have to receive treatment from another person – a spiritual doctor, a sage, yogi or saint. The sage can say almost anything – perhaps significant or insignificant, either obviously or not obviously directed at you,

perhaps seemingly superficial statements of fact, gossip or philosophical ideas, whatever – but these words can help to shake and upset the 'boat' of mental lethargy and fixity existing in your mind. The mind is changed and sent in new directions. You may or may not be aware of the process, but it will happen.

Satsang is not a new thing. It has existed throughout the world since time immemorial. At the dawn of history, primitive tribes and village communities always had a wise man, shaman, medicine man, call him what you will. They were respected people whose views were sought by others. They gave satsang.

Satsang was practised in ancient Greece. Many of the books by Plato and other great sages are based on speeches given during satsang. The Greek sages were called philosophers, which means 'lovers of the truth'.

The difference between rhetoric and sophism is clearly described in the Greek classic called *The Phaedrus* which is based on satsang given by Socrates and written down by Plato. Socrates is one example of a great sage who used to give talks based on knowledge of the truth. He used to give satsang to his many disciples and to many others who cared to listen. Plato was the chronicler of his master's enlightened satsang.

Christ gave satsang to multitudes of people the length and breadth of Galilee. He transformed the lives of many people, converting them. Many examples are given in the *Bible*. The greatest recorded satsang of Christ is The Sermon on the Mount (John, verse 5 onwards). Buddha gave satsang for almost fifty years in every place that he went. The Buddhist scriptures are full of the recorded words of Buddha. All religions of the world are based on satsang – words of the wise. Every mystical system is based on satsang and every scripture is nothing but recorded satsang.

Satsang has been praised in many scriptures. The following quotations are from the *Rama-*

yana, one of the most popular scriptures in India: "Without satsang there is no discrimination. Satsang only comes with the grace of Rama." (*Balakand*) The faculty of discrimination can only be sharpened by satsang; this is absolutely necessary for progress in yoga. Normally one's thoughts revolve and revolve in the 'wheels of the mind' without being able to escape from built-in misconceptions. Only satsang can break up the grooves of the mind. Yet the chance to attend satsang only comes with the grace of Rama; that is when you are ready to listen.

Here is another quotation from the same chapter: "Wise people take bath in the holy water of satsang. In this way they clean and purify their inner being." Liquid water cleans the body; the 'water' of satsang cleans the mind.

"Satsang is like the philosopher's stone. Even the most wicked people have been transformed by the power of satsang, in the same way that the philosopher's stone changes iron into gold."

The writer of the *Ramayana*, Valmiki, is a good example of this transformation. He was a robber for many years. Then he met his guru Narada Muni and attended satsang. He was a pessimist and he did not believe in saints and yogis. Yet in time his whole life was transformed. He became a great yogi and was eventually inspired to write the *Ramayana* to help others. If you attend satsang, this same change may occur in you, perhaps even against your will.

How does one know if another person is wise or not, whether he is a saint or a charlatan? You must find out for yourself. Don't listen to what others tell you. They can only tell you their own personal preferences and prejudices, likes and dislikes. Feel from your own experience. If you feel really good in contact with a certain sage then this is a good indication that you are on the right path. If you feel some peace then this is also a good sign. If there is a feeling of negativity this does not mean that you are not with a great sage, but that he or she is probably not destined to be part of your path towards self-knowledge. You must go to satsang and test for yourself. There is no other method.

What should one do during satsang? Do whatever comes naturally. If you want to ask questions, and the opportunity arises,

then ask. But do not feel obliged. The most meaningful answers are communicated at deeper, more subtle levels. If you want only to sit, then sit; there is no need to do anything else.

Satsang is the essence of yogic life. We suggest that you contact sages, though they are rare and not always easy to find. Some are world famous, others are unknown. But if you start to seek, then you will find. And contact, whether regular or occasional, will help to bring order and sense into your life. You will start to commune with the deeper layers of being, to tune in with that which underlies all things. With good reason it is said that spiritual life or rebirth begins with satsang.

At first, satsang means being in the actual company of sages, yogis, saints, your guru. But eventually there is no need for this face to face confrontation. The satsang will occur even during physical separation. It will be with the particular sage you have tuned in with; it will mean continuous satsang with consciousness. You will commune with the deepest and central core of your being. Everything becomes satsang . . . communion.

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 12: SHAMBHAVI (PARVATI'S LOTUS)

Shambhavi is the name of the wife of Shiva. She is known by many other names including Parvati, Shakti, Uma and so forth. She symbolizes energy and the manifested world, while Shiva represents consciousness. They represent the two sides of the same coin of existence.

Kriya 12 is dedicated to Shambhavi, since without her power all the kriyas, and in fact all yogic practices, would be impossible. Without energy, gross or subtle, it is not possible to practise any sadhana.

In English this kriya can be called 'Parvati's lotus' or 'Shambhavi's lotus'.

Subsidiary practices

In order to practise shambhavi you need to know the following subsidiary techniques:

1. Ujjayi pranayama¹
2. Khechari mudra¹

These are an integral part of the previous kriyas and you should be familiar with them.

Visualization

In this practice you have to visualize a lotus growing in the spine, with the roots in mooladhara and the flower in sahasrara. At first this may be difficult, but with practice it will become easier and easier. You have to gaze into the chidakasha (space of consciousness) in front of the closed eyes and feel that the space pervades everywhere, both inside and outside your body. You must feel that the lotus is in the chidakasha, but that its specific location is the spine.

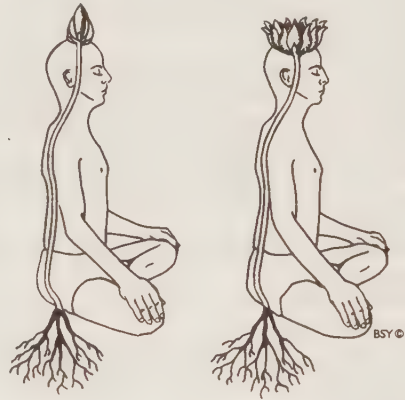
If you have never seen a lotus, then you can visualize any other type of flower, for example, a rose.

Sitting position

You should sit in padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana, if possible. Otherwise you

can sit in any other comfortable meditative asana².

To gain the most from the practice and to maintain one-pointedness of the mind, it is best to remain in the same position that is used for the previous kriyas. That is, it is best to do naumukhi, shakti chalini, shambhavi and the next kriya (amrit pan), without changing the physical position of the body. Keep the back straight throughout the practice.



Technique

Sit in a comfortable pose. Keep the eyes closed. Hold the back straight.

Do khechari mudra.

Try to visualize the lotus growing in the spine. The roots are white or transparent green and they spread out from the region of the mooladhara chakra.

The long, thin, green stem rises upwards in the enter of the spine.

The lotus flower is closed like a bud; below the bud are a few light green, immature petals.

The petals are light pink with red veins.

Visualize the flower at the region of sahasrara.

Try to visualize the whole lotus, from roots to the flower, in the chidakasha; but feel as though it is growing in the spine.

Exhale deeply.

Fix your awareness at mooladhara.
Visualize the roots of the lotus.

Inhale slowly with ujjayi and let your awareness gradually ascend the stem of the lotus in the spine. If possible try to imagine that you are moving up the inside cavity of the stem.

Slowly your awareness climbs the stem as you inhale. At the end of inhalation, your awareness should have reached the top of the stem immediately below the bud.

Hold your breath.

Fix your awareness at sahasrara.

The flower is closed, but slowly it opens and the petals spread out to show the full blossom of the beautiful lotus.

As it opens you will see the yellow tipped stamen in the centre.

The flower closes again, and then begins to open. You must try to feel as though you are perceiving the lotus from both the inside and the outside.

Watch the lotus slowly open and close.

Continue to watch the lotus until the flower ceases to open and close, remaining in bud form, or until you have to exhale.

Then exhale with ujjayi, letting your awareness slowly descend the stem in the spine to mooladhara.

Exhalation should end when you reach mooladhara.

This is the end of 1 round.

Start the second round.

Hold your breath for a few seconds while visualizing the roots spreading out from mooladhara.

Then inhale and ascend the lotus stem again. Do 11 complete rounds.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout. Hold the breath while visualizing the roots of the lotus. Inhale as you ascend the stem. Hold the breath while visualizing the opening and closing of the flower. Exhale as you descend the stem.

Awareness

Be aware of the entire lotus: roots, stem and flower; simultaneously be aware of the breathing process.

Number of rounds

Do 11 rounds. This will take about 11 minutes.

KRIYA 13: AMRIT PAN (QUAFFING THE NECTAR)

The Sanskrit word *amrit* means 'nectar' and *pan* means 'quaffing', 'drinking' or 'sipping'. Amrit pan can therefore be translated as 'quaffing the nectar'. It is the thirteenth kriya and comes immediately after shambhavi.

Amrit

Amrit is the divine fluid which brings immortality. It is called 'the elixir of life', 'the nectar of the gods', 'the nectar of immortality' and 'ambrosia'. Amrit is symbolized in different ways in all world religions. In the Vedas it is called *soma* – the intoxicating fluid of bliss. In Christianity and Tantra it is symbolized by wine. Many poets have endlessly praised the 'sweet wine' that brings unspeakable happiness; they are referring to amrit which comes not from grapes, but from spiritual evolution. Christ said: "But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14)

Lalana chakra

The amrit cascades down from the bindu to the vishuddhi chakra. It is stored in a small chakra called the lalana chakra located in the throat. In the *Bible* it says: "But God clave a hollow place that was in the jaw, and there came water thereout; and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ." (Judges 15:19) The verse is describing not water, but amrit emerging from the lalana chakra. This leads to spiritual awakening and bliss as described, ". . . and when he had drunk, his spirit came again, and he revived . . ."

The lalana is located at the palate at the top and back of the mouth. It is the area which is pressed by the tongue during khechari mudra. This storehouse of amrit can be awakened through yogic practices, including kriya yoga; amrit pan is directly concerned with stimulating it and producing a copious flow of amrit.

The nectar passage

The lalana chakra is connected to vishuddhi chakra by a psychic pathway (nadi) called the nectar passage. It starts at the vishuddhi chakra in the spine at the back of the neck,

and goes directly to the *lalana chakra* in the palate, where it ends. This pathway is clearly shown in the accompanying figure.

Rationale of Amrit Pan

Amrit pan can be described as an upright form of *vipareeta karani mudra*³. Concerning *vipareeta karani mudra*, the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says: “The secretion of the moon (*bindu*) is called *amrit*. It is normally consumed by the fire of the sun (*manipura chakra*). It flows downwards and leads to ageing of the body. There is a wonderful technique which can reverse this process (called *vipareeta karani mudra*).” (3:77–78) Both *vipareeta karani mudra* and *amrit pan* are concerned with reversing this process by redirecting the nectar upwards from *manipura* towards *bindu* via the *lalana chakra*. The same psychic pathway is used in both *kriyas*: In *vipareeta karani mudra*, however, the body is inverted, while in *amrit pan* it remains upright.

Subsidiary practices

To do *amrit pan* you should know the following subsidiary techniques:

1. *Ujjayi pranayama*¹
2. *Khechari mudra*¹

Sitting position

You should sit in *padmasana*, *siddhasana* or *siddha yoni asana*. If these are impossible or uncomfortable, sit in any other suitable meditative *asana*².

Preferably you should sit in the same pose that was used for the previous *kriya* – *shambhavi*. That is, you should proceed from one *kriya* to the next without changing your physical position and without stopping the sequence of practice.

Technique

Remain in a comfortable sitting *asana*.

Keep the eyes closed.

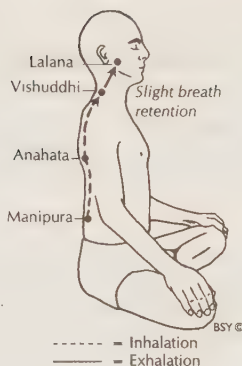
Hold the back straight and the head upright as shown above.

Do *khechari mudra*, pressing the tongue firmly but not forcefully against the back of the palate. Fix your awareness at *manipura chakra* in the spine.

Exhale deeply.

Round 1 starts here.

Try to feel the *manipura chakra*.



Then inhale with *ujjayi* and imagine that you are drawing fluid upwards from the *manipura*, through *anahata* to *vishuddhi*.

You should feel as though the fluid is being injected upwards by the force of *ujjayi* inhalation.

Inhalation should end when your awareness reaches *vishuddhi*.

Hold your breath for a short duration and fix your awareness at *vishuddhi*.

Feel the fluid or nectar become ice cold.

Then exhale with *ujjayi* and feel the cool nectar being injected along the nectar passage from *vishuddhi* to the *lalana chakra*.

Synchronize the flow of nectar with the exhalation.

When your awareness reaches the *lalana* you should feel the breath and nectar disperse and evaporate.

Remember: the *lalana* is located where the tip of the tongue presses the palate.

Immediately your awareness should return directly to the *manipura chakra*.

This is the end of the first round.

Start the second round.

After fixing the awareness at *manipura* for a short period with breath retention, breathe in and ascend to *vishuddhi*.

Do 9 complete rounds.

Breathing

You should practise *ujjayi pranayama* throughout. Hold the breath while fixing awareness at the *manipura chakra*. Inhale from *manipura* to *vishuddhi*. Hold the breath while fixing awareness at the *vishuddhi chakra*. Breathe out from *vishuddhi* to the *lalana chakra* through the nectar passage.

Awareness

Be aware of the ujjayi breathing and the flow of nectar.

Number of rounds

Do 9 rounds. This should take about 5 minutes.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 4

Asanas: Practice

The following two asanas need both a good sense of balance and strength in the legs. They are called:

1. Ardha baddha padmottanasana

2. Vatayanasana

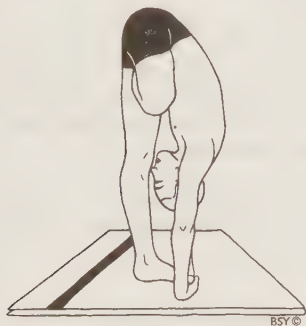
If you have time you should try them.

ARDHA BADDHA PADMOTTANASANA (HALF LOTUS FORWARD BENDING POSE)

Ardha means 'half', *baddha* means 'bound', *padma* means 'lotus' and *utthan* means 'raised'. This asana can be translated as 'the raised and bound half lotus pose'. Generally it is called 'the half lotus leg stretch pose'.

Support

If you wish you can practise beside or in front of a wall.



Technique

Stand upright.

Open the eyes and keep them open throughout the practice.

Balance on the left leg.

Fold the right leg and place the foot on the left thigh; adjust the foot with your hands so that it forms the half lotus.

Raise the two arms over the head, clasp the fingers, and balance on the left leg.

This is the starting pose.

Relax and steady the whole body.

Slowly bend forward as you breathe out.

At the end of exhalation you should be fully bent forward with the two hands placed on the left foot.

Try to keep the left leg straight.

If possible, try to touch the left knee with your nose or forehead, and place the hands flat on the floor.

This is the final pose as shown.

Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable, either holding the breath or breathing slowly and deeply.

Then breathe in and slowly return to the upright starting pose.

Unfold the right leg.

Then balance on the right leg and fold the left leg into half lotus position.

Repeat the same process.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale while bending forwards. Hold the breath or breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose. Inhale while raising the body to the starting position.

Be aware of maintaining balance and synchronizing the movement with the breath.

You can practise for as long as you wish, but don't strain. Practise at any time of the day, but not after food.

Restrictions

This asana should not be done by people who suffer from:

- slipped disc
- sciatica
- hernia
- weak legs

Benefits

Ardha baddha padmottanasana strengthens the leg muscles, improves blood circulation, stimulates the digestive processes and develops a good sense of balance.

VATAYANASANA (FLYING HORSE POSE)

The word *vata* means 'air' and *yana* means 'a vehicle'. Literally, the asana can be translated as 'the airborne vehicle pose'. However, the composite word *vatayana* has another meaning: 'a flying horse' or 'a horse that moves like the wind'. Specifically it is the name of a flying horse that is a part of Indian mythology. The equivalent in Western and Greek myths is Pegasus, the winged horse. Therefore, *vatayanasana* can be translated as 'the flying horse pose', 'winged horse pose' or 'the galloping horse pose'. You may ask: "Why this name? The pose does not look like a horse nor does it help one to fly." The answer will come when you try the asana for yourself. It is very difficult to raise the body using the muscles of only one leg. The arms have to be used both to provide balance and to give an extra upward momentum. The arms are held sideways like wings and used to help raise the body to the standing position in the same way that Pegasus raises itself with its large wings.

If you watch someone else, with imagination you will also see that the two legs in the final pose do slightly resemble the legs of a horse in profile. The name *vatayanasana* is actually a very fitting description of the asana.

Support

If you wish you can stand beside or in front of a wall for support.

Technique

Stand upright.

Bend the left leg and place the foot on the right thigh (half lotus).

Balance on the right leg.

Place the two hands together in front of the chest.

Gaze at a fixed point on the wall in front of your eyes.

This is the starting position.

Spread the arms sideways like wings.

Inhale deeply.

Hold your breath.

Slowly bend the right leg and lower the body.

Be careful not to lose balance and not to lower the body too quickly and thump the left knee against the floor.

Eventually your left knee should rest on the floor.



Again place the hands together in front of the chest.

This is the final pose as shown.

Stay in the final pose for a short period breathing deeply and slowly.

Then breathe in deeply.

Hold the breath.

Spread the arms sideways.

Slowly raise the body using the right leg assisted by the two arms.

When you reach the standing position, breathe out and unfold the left leg.

Repeat the same procedure with the right leg folded in the half lotus position.

Breathing

Inhale while in the starting pose with one leg folded. Hold the breath as you lower the body.

Breathe deeply and slowly in the final pose.

Inhale before raising the body. Hold the breath while raising the body.

Duration and time of practice

Vatayanasana can be done for as long as you wish, but don't strain. It can be done at any time.

Benefits

Vatayanasana strengthens the leg muscles and improves the blood circulation. It tones up the sexual organs and generally stimulates the whole body.

Pranayama: Cooling Practices

There are a few simple yogic practices that cool down the body. Three important ones are:

1. Sheetkari pranayama
2. Sheetal pranayama
3. Kaki mudra

These techniques will be discussed in the following pages.

Strange changes are occurring in the climates of the world: temperate countries are undergoing scorching summers, droughts, etc., while tropical and dry countries are having harsh winters and wet summers. The cause is variously attributed to atomic bomb blasts, sunspot activity, change in the tilt of the earth, the arrival of the Satya Yuga (the Age of Truth), the end of the world and so forth. The only thing that most people are really certain of is their own discomfort at these climatic changes.

Those people who are now experiencing cold weather can do bhastrika pranayama etc. to heat up the body. Those who are experiencing excessive heat, however, are strictly prohibited from prolonged practice of most forms of pranayama. The only types they are advised to do are the three described in this topic, since they directly help to cool down the body. Many people may find these practices useful, perhaps those who live in tropical, arid climates.

SHEETALI PRANAYAMA (COOLING BREATH)

The Sanskrit word *sheetali* means 'cooling' or 'relaxing'. This type of pranayama is so called because it cools down the body and relaxes the mind. In English it is usually called 'the cooling pranayama' or 'cooling breath'.

Scriptural references

The practice is briefly described in various hatha yoga scriptures. The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* states: "Those who are wise should inhale

through the mouth and then exhale slowly, through the nose." (3:57)

No other practical details are given. Benefits are briefly mentioned in the following verse: "Sheetali pranayama alleviates diseases of the spleen and other large organs of the body, and helps to remove fever, hunger, thirst and bilious problems. Furthermore, it helps to eradicate all poisons from the body." (3:58)

A slightly fuller description of the method is given in the *Gheranda Samhita*: "Inhale through the tongue and fill the lungs. Do kumbhaka (breath retention) for a few seconds and then exhale through the nostrils." (5:72)

Here it clearly indicates that one should breathe in through the tongue. The benefits are described in the next verse: "A sadhaka should do sheetali pranayama since it eliminates indigestion, coughs and bilious problems". (3:73)

A similar description is given in chapter three of the *Shiva Samhita*.

Rolling of tongue

During inhalation the tongue has to be rolled as shown below.

Roll the tongue so that both sides curl upwards and inwards, with the edges almost meeting each other. Needless to say, the teeth should be separated. The end of the tongue should protrude outside the mouth, but without strain. The rolled tongue forms a tube through which one inhales.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable meditative asana.

Hold the back straight and head upright, but without strain.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

Be aware of breathing.

Roll the tongue.



Slowly inhale through the tube-like tongue.
Breathe in deeply, but without strain.
Then hold the breath.
Withdraw the tongue and close the mouth.
Do jalandhara bandha¹.
After a few seconds release jalandhara bandha.
Exhale slowly through the nose.
Be aware of the breath flow.
The first round is completed at the end of exhalation.

Further details

For details of awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of the practice, see 'General Details' at the end of this topic.

SHEETKARI PRANAYAMA (HISSING BREATH)

The sound *shee* or *sheet* is made during inhalation in this practice. The Sanskrit word *kari* means 'that which produces'. Therefore, *sheetkari* can be translated as the pranayama that produces the sound 'shee'. In English the practice is usually called 'the hissing breath'.

Scriptural references

This practice is mentioned in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, which states: "Make the sound 'shee' while breathing through the mouth. By doing this practice one will become like Kamadeva (Cupid – the god of love)." (3:54)

Many worthwhile benefits can be gained from regular practice of this asana.

Shape of mouth

During inhalation the mouth should be shaped as shown in the following picture.

Press the lower and upper teeth together. Separate the lips as much as is comfortable. Fold the tongue backwards into khechari mudra so that the lower surface gently presses the upper palate².

Inhale through the gaps in the teeth.

Those who have many teeth missing or no teeth at all will find this practice impossible. We suggest that you do sheetali pranayama or kaki mudra as alternatives.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable asana.
Close the eyes.
Shape the mouth as described.

Breathe in slowly and deeply.

At the end of inhalation close the mouth, keeping the tongue in khechari mudra.

Hold the breath and do jalandhara bandha for a few seconds.

Then release the bandha, and raise the head. Slowly breathe out through the nose.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do more rounds.



Further details

For full details of awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of this practice, refer to 'General Details' given later.

KAKI MUDRA (CROW'S BEAK)

This practice is really a mudra, but we regard it as a pranayama practice because of its close similarity to sheetali and sheetkari pranayama.

The word *kaki* means 'crow'. This practice is so called because, during inhalation, the mouth is shaped like a crow's beak. In English it is usually called 'the crow's beak'. It is also said that regular practice of this mudra leads to a disease-free, long life that is often associated with the crow.

Shape of the lips

During inhalation the lips should be shaped as shown in the following picture. The two lips should be pursed together leaving a small tube through which the air may be inhaled. The tongue should be relaxed.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable asana.
Place the hands on the lap or on the knees.

Keep the eyes open throughout the practice.

Do nasikagra drishti by fixing both eyes on the nose tip³.

Try not to blink the eyes.

The first round starts here.

Purse the lips.

Breathe in slowly and deeply through the mouth.

At the end of inhalation close the lips.



Exhale through the nose.

The first round is completed at the end of exhalation. Do more rounds.

Remember, the eyes must be kept open throughout the practice and there should be continuous practise of nasikagra drishti.

Further details

For full details on awareness, benefits, duration and other aspects of the practice see below.

GENERAL DETAILS

The following details apply to all the three practices: sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra.

Awareness

Be aware of the flow and the sound of the breath, as well as the mechanics of the practice. In kaki mudra your awareness must simultaneously be fixed on the nose tip.

Duration and time of practice

You can do the practices for as long as you wish and at any time during the day.

Benefits and utility

Most yogic practices tend to overheat the body. Sheetali and sheetkari pranayama, as well as kaki mudra, on the other hand, cool down the body. They can therefore be done after other yogic practices to restore heat balance in the body. Prolonged practice of pranayama is not generally advisable during hot weather. Sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra, however, can be done without fear.

Besides cooling the physical body, these three practices also cool the mind and soothe away mental tension. They are therefore useful for alleviating psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure. The practices also purify the blood and improve digestion.

Warning

One of the fundamental laws of yogic practice, and breathing in general, is that one should inhale through the nose if possible. Sheetali, sheetkari and kaki mudra are unique in that they break this law; inhalation is through the mouth instead of the nose. This infringement is acceptable providing you:

- Do not practise in a dirty, polluted atmosphere

- Do not practise in excessively cold weather. The nose heats up and cleans inhaled air before entering the delicate lungs. If you breathe through the mouth then this air conditioning is bypassed. The induction of freezing and/or dirty air directly into the lungs for prolonged periods may cause harm. Therefore, do not practise sheetali, sheetkari or kaki mudra unless you live in reasonably clean, mild surroundings.

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 5

Yoga Nidra (Part 1)

Yoga nidra is a practice which can be widely applied in the modern world to improve the quality and happiness of human life. It is a simple yet profound technique and has been used in the following fields:

- *Relaxation*: yoga nidra is the best, cheapest and most permanent method of inducing deep relaxation of the entire human structure and personality.
- *Meditation*: it is a meditative technique.
- *Psychological problems*: yoga nidra acts directly in eradicating deep-rooted psychological complexes, neuroses, inhibitions, etc. It is an advanced psychiatric tool.
- *Psychosomatic ailments*: yoga nidra helps to remove a vast number of ailments that are predominantly mental in cause, such as high blood pressure.
- *Sleep*: yoga nidra induces and improves deep sleep. It is a non-chemical tranquillizer that quickly removes insomnia.
- *Physio-psychological rejuvenation* of the entire human organism can be brought about by yoga nidra. The physical, pranic and mental levels of man are directly recharged.
- *Mind exploration and awakening*: yoga nidra opens up the potential of the mind and also awakens the faculty of intuition.
- *Learning, education and intelligence*: yoga nidra is a profound educational tool. Through investigations and tests, it has been found to bring extraordinary improvements in both the absorption and retention of information from external sources as well as the tapping of knowledge within one's own mind. It heightens intelligence in all meanings of the word.

Yoga nidra has a vast number of other applications. It is a panacea for the tension-ridden world of today. It can be practised by everyone, young and old, male or female. It is thoroughly scientific and tested. It requires no belief or blind acceptance of a dogma. It only requires practice.

In this and the following lessons we will describe the various aspects and applications of yoga nidra, together with comprehensive, yet easy to understand instructions on practice¹.

Definition

The word *yoga* means inner communion; the process that leads to this state. *Nidra* means sleep. Thus yoga nidra can be defined as 'yogic sleep'. It is both the name of a specific yogic practice and a state of being. The mechanics of the practice are easy to understand and define, but the state of yoga nidra will be understood differently by different people as follows:

Sleep: to a person who is tired, exhausted and constantly worried, the state of yoga nidra will mean only one thing . . . a deep, refreshing sleep. Nothing more, nothing less. Many are the people who practise yoga nidra alone or attend yoga nidra classes only for one purpose: to sink into the oblivion of sleep. And there is absolutely nothing wrong with this, since your deep sleep will bring many benefits. In yoga nidra lessons one is generally asked to remain wakeful, but if you cannot do this, do not worry . . . enjoy your sleep. Sometime in the future you can try to remain awake.

Psychic sleep: to other people, possibly those who have been practising yoga for a few years, yoga nidra will mean a state of conscious dreaming, where one will see visions of the subconscious mind. One will seem to hover in a state midway between sleep and wakefulness. In this state one will confront subconscious problems, suppressions, fears, etc. Regular practice will slowly clean and polish the mind.

Sleepless sleep: this is the highest state of yoga nidra where one balances on the razor's edge between introversion and extroversion. This is the path of sushumna and corresponds to the awakening of the kundalini². This is the blissful and mystical state of 'yoga' that corresponds to superconsciousness. It has been described by innumerable yogis, saints, bhaktas and

sages throughout history. In the great yogic scripture called *Yogataravali*, Shankaracharya has written: "When sankalpa (desires) and vikalpa (fancies and imaginations) are rooted out then one is influenced no more by karma. When sankalpa and vikalpa are removed by constant yogic practice the ever-blissful state of yoga nidra dawns."

We have defined three specific states of yoga nidra. As a practice we can describe it as a method of inducing physical and nervous tranquillity, as a method of ridding the mind of chronic tension, and of inducing inner knowledge and meditation. It nulls the rational thought processes and brings inner peace.

The layers of the mind

Yoga nidra is a method of exploring the different layers of the mind. According to certain schools of modern psychology there are three dimensions of mind: the conscious, subconscious and unconscious. The *Mandukya Upanishad* also classifies the mind into three layers: *jagrat*, *swapna* and *sushupti*. The yogic and psychological terminology can be directly related as follows:

<i>Jagrat</i> :	conscious mind waking state surface thoughts and perception of the outside world <i>sthula</i> (gross dimension)
<i>Swapna</i> :	subconscious mind dream state individual memory and mind <i>sukshma</i> (subtle dimension)
<i>Sushupti</i> :	unconscious mind deep conscious sleep state collective memory <i>karana</i> (causal dimension)

Yoga nidra starts from the swapna state – that is, exploration of the subconscious mind. If one masters yoga nidra then the depth of perception may become deeper so that one contacts and explores the sushupti or cosmic mind. Great yogis go even further: they transcend the mind. They enter the state of superconsciousness. In the *Mandukya Upanishad* this state is called *turiya* (the fourth dimension of being). This is the highest state of yoga nidra, which few attain. The

Yogataravali says: "Beyond these three states (*jagrat*, *swapna* and *sushupti*) there is *turiya*. It is a state that is spontaneously experienced by yogis. It is real yoga nidra in the form of pure, illumined consciousness. This yoga nidra is not part of *prakriti* (nature) but it is the manifested form of *purusha* (consciousness)." (v. 26)

The aim of yoga nidra is to progressively explore and transcend the different states of mind.

Nyasa – traditional yoga nidra

The word *nyasa* means 'to place'. It is a practice in which specific mantras are 'placed' and felt at different parts of the body. It is the traditional form of yoga nidra used by yogis throughout the ages and still practised by almost all Hindus.

Nyasa is described in various scriptures such as the *Brihad Yoga Yajnavalkya Smriti* and the *Yogataravali*, as well as many upanishadic and tantric texts. The *Aruneeyi Upanishad* (verse 5) advises all wandering sannyasins to practise *nyasa* at all times – to chant Aum and to place it mentally at different parts of the body. More specific and ritualistic forms of *nyasa* are described in the *Mahanirvana Tantra*. They include the following:

Matrika nyasa in which the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet (*matrikas*) are placed on different parts of the physical body of the *sadhaka* while chanting the corresponding sound.

Hridayadi sadanga nyasa literally means the placing of the hands on six different parts (*sadanga*) of the body beginning with the heart (*hridaya*). Specific mantras are chanted as follows: when touching the heart chant *namah*; when touching the head *swaha*; at the crown lock chant *vasat* and so forth.

Kara nyasa in which mantras are placed and chanted on the fingers, thumbs and palms of the hands. (Note: most forms of yoga nidra that we teach include this type of *nyasa*, but without the mantras).

Vyapaka nyasa, all pervasive (*vyapaka*) *nyasa*. This form is so called because the energy of the mantras is distributed throughout all the parts of the body, together with awareness. Specific mantras are placed and felt on the head, mouth, heart, etc.

Nyasa is widely practised by Hindus throughout the world. A well-known practice is called

angvinyasa (nyasa of the different limbs of the body). It is described in various scriptures, including the *Durga Saptashati*. Almost all Hindu puja (worship), whether for Kali, Durga, Shiva or Saraswati, start with this type of nyasa. Specific mantras are chanted and associated with different parts of the body. The practice starts as follows and continues with specific mantras for each part:

Small finger: *Aum Kannestha Abhyam Namahe*
 Second finger: *Aum Anamikastha Abhyam Namahe*

Third finger: *Aum Madhyama Abhyam Namahe*
 Fourth finger: *Aum Tarjaneem Abhyam Namahe*
 Thumb: *Aum Angushtha Abhyam Namahe*

It is a ritual which has far reaching benefits. It is intended to induce pratyahara in preparation for dharana.

All these methods of nyasa are very powerful. They can be either external (*bahir*) where the parts of the body are physically touched, or they can be internal (*antar*) where the mantras and awareness are mentally placed. A vast selection of mantras is used, including *Aum*, *Phat*, *Hrim*, *Krim*, the Gayatri mantra and so forth. The bija (seed) mantras of the chakras can also be used – *Lam*, *Vam*, *Ram*, etc. – and rotated throughout the six chakras. The mantra chanting and rotation of awareness harmonizes the nervous system, balances pranic flows and renders the mind one-pointed. Each part of the body is systematically charged with the energy of the mantras. The whole body and mind are purified and prepared for meditation.

Yoga nidra has been adapted from the traditional practices of nyasa by Swami Satyananda to meet the needs of modern man. The mantras have been omitted so that yoga nidra can be practised by all people regardless of religion, language and tradition. Though devoid of mantras, yoga nidra has been carefully designed so that it retains its power to transform the personality and receptivity of the practitioner. The emphasis has been transferred from mantra chanting (nyasa) to rotation of awareness (yoga nidra). Mantras such as *Aum* or the guru mantra can, however, be chanted at each centre of the body during yoga nidra if required. Both methods, nyasa and yoga nidra, have their advantages. Possibly in the near future we can reintroduce the practice of nyasa, with mantras, and

propagate them on a large scale. This will supplement the present widespread practise of yoga nidra.

Structure of the practice

Yoga nidra can be roughly divided into the following sections:

1. Preliminary adjustment of the body
2. Preliminary relaxation of the physical body
3. Preliminary relaxation of the mind
4. Sankalpa (resolve)
5. Rotation of awareness throughout the different parts of the body
6. Visualization
7. Reflection and symbol awareness
8. Sankalpa
9. Return to external awareness

These nine stages are sequential; that is, they should be practised one after the other in the order given. Variations can be adopted within this basic framework.

Full details of these stages of yoga nidra will be described progressively in this and forthcoming lessons¹.

Instructions

The instructions for yoga nidra can be given in three ways: by the direct words of a teacher; from a tape recording; by one's own mental commands. It is best to learn yoga nidra directly from a teacher so that the instructions can be modified to suit your individual needs, and so that the correct method is firmly imprinted on your mind. Eventually, however, you should practise alone, either by self-instructions or listening to a tape recording of your teacher's lesson.

In this book we are forced to give written instructions. These are not very suitable for the practice of yoga nidra. We suggest that you either transfer the instructions to tape, or that you ask a friend to read them to you while you practise yoga nidra.

The instructor

Choose a teacher carefully. He or she should have some understanding of the potential of the mind through personal experience. Specifically, the teacher should have awakened a degree of intuitive perception. There should be a feeling of empathy between you.

It is best to learn yoga nidra from one teacher, so that the sound of his or her voice

makes a deep impression on your subconscious mind. You should slowly become receptive to the sound of one voice so that your mind flows spontaneously with the given instructions without resistance. Of course no harm will occur if you change your teacher, or take lessons from different people, but one teacher is certainly best for serious practise of yoga nidra.

The sound link

During yoga nidra there is no need for physical contact between the teacher and the practitioner. The only contact should be psychic and through the sound of the voice.

The teacher's voice should be calm and clear. The speed of instructions should be varied according to the needs of the situation. The teacher must feel the needs of the student(s). Intuition is required. The instructions should be sufficiently fast that they capture the attention of the practitioner and prevent the mind wandering here and there or brooding on problems; but not so fast that the instructions cannot be understood or carried out. If necessary, there can be frequent repetition of the instructions. When the practitioner reaches deeper states of relaxation then the instructions can be slowed down.

Suggestions and dogmas should be avoided. The instructions should be concerned only with the explanation of the mechanics of yoga nidra and the sequence of practice. The tone of voice should be modulated to suit the circumstances.

For the practitioner, the voice is very important. It is the link that enables you to maintain awareness while exploring the deeper layers of the mind. Without a guiding voice you will surely lapse into sleep (which is, however, perfectly acceptable in cases where the practitioner is very tired and perhaps suffers from insomnia). Do not intellectualize about the instructor's words. Do not try to remember them. Just follow them spontaneously without too much effort. Flow with the sound of the voice.

YOGA NIDRA – PART 1

To gain the most from the practice of yoga nidra you should carry out the following rules and preparations:

Clothing: remove all tight-fitting and uncomfortable clothing. It is best to practise in loose, light clothes, the less the better, especially in hot climates. In cold climates you should wear sufficient clothing to remain warm throughout the practice, or cover yourself with a warm blanket.

Insects: if there are any insects such as mosquitoes and flies, then you should either practise under a mosquito net or cover yourself with a light sheet.

Heat: if it is very hot then you can practise under a fan providing it works silently. Do not practise under direct blasts of air. Only use a fan if it is absolutely necessary.

Environment: practise in a quiet, dark, freshly ventilated room. Do not practise under glaring lights, with foul smells, in a room that contains dust-ridden stale air, or where there are many disturbances. No matter how pleasant, it is best not to practise yoga nidra in the open air.

Ornaments: remove your wristwatch, spectacles, jewellery and all other body ornaments before beginning yoga nidra.

Loosening up exercises: during yoga nidra you will be required to remain in one position without moving for a period of time. This is difficult if your body is stiff. If necessary you can practise a few asanas before starting yoga nidra. We suggest naukasana³ and surya namaskara⁴.

Adjustment of body: before commencing yoga nidra you should exhaust all need to move your body. It is better to move the body before the practice than during the practice. If you feel skin irritation, then scratch yourself. If your clothing feels uncomfortable, then make some adjustments. Make yourself perfectly comfortable before thinking about starting yoga nidra. Any time that you spend making these preparations will be more than justified since you will gain more from the subsequent practice of yoga nidra.

Time of practice: you can practise at any time during the day and night, though not immediately after meals; wait for an hour or so. Practise when you feel physically and/or mentally tired. If you suffer from insomnia or disturbed sleep, practise yoga nidra in bed at night.

Posture

The physical posture in yoga nidra should be so comfortable that you forget the existence

of the body so that it can be almost regarded as merely a 'shell' or 'husk' of the mind. A position should be chosen that can be maintained without movement for between 10 and 60 minutes. A wide selection of poses can be used for this purpose, but from our experience there is one that is easily the best – shavasana (the corpse pose)³.

Place a blanket on flat level ground.

Lie flat on your back.

A thin pillow can be placed under the back of the head if you wish, but it should not be too thick.

The head, arms and legs should lie in one line.

The palms should face upwards.

The eyes should be closed.

Relax the whole body when you have made all preparatory physical adjustments and when you have exhausted all need to move the body. Yoga nidra can then start at this point.

Technique 1: preliminary practice

This practice includes preliminary relaxation of the body and mind, which has already been fully described in our previous discussion called 'The Art and Science of Relaxation'⁵.

Notes

¹ Yoga nidra: Stage 2 – Book III, Lesson 34, Topic 4; Stage 3 – Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 4; Stage 4 – Book III, Lesson 36, Topic 5

² Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

⁵ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Daily Practice Program

We have introduced two new kriyas – sham-bhavi and amrit pan. If you have sufficient time integrate them into practice program 1; if you lack time, then omit them and do programs 2, 3 or 4 instead.

If you live in a hot climate try one of the three cooling techniques that we have described – sheetkari and sheetali pranayama and kaki mudra.

Try to master the two new asanas – ardha baddha padmottanasana and vatayanasana. They can be done at any time and in any place.

We consider yoga nidra one of the most useful practices of yoga. It can be practised by everyone, old and young, healthy and ill. It requires no difficult sitting position. If you do not already know the practice we suggest that you start to practise it.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours 14 minutes – extended kriya practice	
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Kriya 10: Naumukhi Mudra	5
Kriya 11: Shakti Chalini	5
Kriya 12: Shambhavi	11
Kriya 13: Amrit Pan	5
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Program 2: shortened kriya practice

Do as many of the above kriyas as you can, doing each in turn starting from kriya 1.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Sheetali, Sheetkari or Kaki Mudra	10
Antar Mouna (or any other meditative practice)	20
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana	3
Sheetali, Sheetkari or Kaki Mudra	6
	30

Try to find the time, perhaps in the evening after work, to practise yoga nidra. Its benefits are profound.

Lesson 34

When the sankalpa and vikalpa are rooted out, the karmas influence no more, desires and illusions are removed by the unbroken practice, then only does the ever blissful state of yoga nidra dawn. The state which is other than the three present states, enjoyed by the yogis in a relaxed way, is called turiya; then only the omnipresent nidra in the form of pure consciousness illumines. Therefore, always enjoy that nidra which is not a form of prakriti but is the manifested form of purusha.

—Adishankaracharya, *Yogataravali* 25:26

Kriya Yoga Practice

KRIYA 14: CHAKRA BHEDAN (PIERCING THE CHAKRAS)

The word *chakra* means 'psychic centre', and *bhedan* means 'to pierce'. The practice of *chakra bhedan* can be translated as 'piercing the chakras or psychic centres'. It is the fourteenth kriya and comes immediately after amrit pan¹.

Out-of-phase breath awareness

In most of the kriyas we have taught so far breathing is synchronized with awareness of the arohan and awarohan psychic passages. That is, with inhalation awareness ascends the frontal arohan passage and with exhalation awareness descends the spinal awarohan passage. The characteristic feature of *chakra bhedan* is that the breathing is not perfectly synchronized with the awareness of the two psychic pathways. Instead, the relationship is as follows:

Inhalation from swadhisthana downwards to mooladhara and then upwards in the frontal arohan passage to vishuddhi, passing through the intermediate kshetrams in turn.

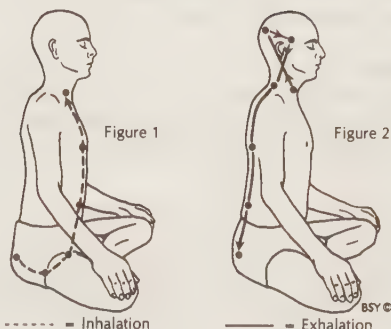
Exhalation upwards from vishuddhi to bindu and then downwards in the spinal awarohan passage to swadhisthana, passing through the intermediate chakras in turn. The breath is rotated through the two psychic pathways, but slightly out of phase.

Sitting position

The best sitting poses are padmasana, siddhasana or siddha yoni asana². If you cannot do these asanas then any other comfortable sitting asana will suffice. It is best if you remain in the same asana that was used for the previous kriya.

Continuity

When you have finished amrit pan, the previous kriya, immediately start *chakra bhedan*. Do not move your body or let your mind wander.



Technique

Remain in your sitting position, head upright facing forwards.

Keep your eyes closed.

Continue khechari mudra and ujjayi pranayama³.

Exhale.

Fix your awareness at the swadhisthana chakra in the spinal awarohan passage.

Then while inhaling, move your awareness downwards from the swadhisthana chakra to the mooladhara chakra.

Then move upwards through the following kshetrams in the front of the body:

1. swadhisthana
2. manipura
3. anahata
4. vishuddhi.

This whole process is shown in figure 1 of the above picture.

Be aware of each centre one after the other and feel them being pierced by the breath. Don't stop at any centre.

Let your awareness and breath be like a long, thin thread.

Inhalation ends at the vishuddhi kshetram.

Immediately start exhalation, with awareness moving upwards to bindu . . . and then descending through the following chakras in the spine: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura,

swadhisthana. The entire process is depicted in figure 2. Exhalation should end at the swadhisthana chakra.

This is the end of 1 round.

Immediately start the second round. Inhale from swadhisthana to mooladhara and then up the frontal passage.

Your breath and awareness should go round and round . . . continuously without break.

Do 59 complete rounds.

Breathing

Practise ujjayi pranayama throughout the practice. The breathing should be out of phase with the psychic passage awareness, as described.

Awareness

Be aware of the continuous flow of breath moving through the arohan and awarehan psychic passages and the piercing of chakras and kshetrams.

Number of rounds and duration

You should practise 59 rounds. If however, you find that you become too introverted then immediately leave chakra bhedan and start the next practice.

Between 20 and 30 minutes will be required to do 59 complete rounds.

KRIYA 15: SUSHUMNA DARSHANA (INNER VISUALIZATION OF THE CHAKRAS)

The word *sushumna* has profound implications in yoga and spiritual life. Among other things, it indicates balance between:

1. The sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems of the physical body.
2. The cooling and heating currents of the pranic body.
3. Introversion and extroversion of the mind.

The sushumna is the middle path between the ida and pingala aspects of life. It is the razor's edge along which one must tread in order to progress in spiritual life. If you stray off the sushumna path then you will get lost, remain in ignorance and cease to open up the potential and knowledge contained within your being. It is the only route to self-realization. For a deeper explanation refer to our previous discussion entitled 'The Balance of Life'⁴.

In the physical body, sushumna is symbolized by a thin thread passing up the centre of the spine, passing through the principal chakras in turn, starting from mooladhara chakra and culminating in sahasrara.

The word *darshana* in the context of this kriya means 'vision'. Therefore, the practice of *sushumna darshana* can be translated as 'the vision of the sushumna passage'. It is the fifteenth kriya and comes immediately after chakra bhedan.

The practice is based entirely on mental visualization. Many people will find it difficult. Please don't worry; only do your best.

Diagrams for visualization

In the practice you have to visualize symbolic pictures of the chakras, one after the other and then all together in the following order⁵:

1. Mooladhara
2. Swadhisthana
3. Manipura
4. Anahata
5. Vishuddhi
6. Ajna
7. Bindu
8. Sahasrara

We suggest that you refer to the diagrams of the chakras given previously⁵.

Remember that any diagrams you are using are only symbolic; they are our symbolic representation of the chakras. If you have your own system or prefer a more traditional system of diagrams, then these can also be used in the practice of sushumna darshana. You are not obliged to use the diagrams that we have given.

Composite chakra chart

To develop the capacity to internally visualize the chakras, it is worthwhile making a chart with all the chakra diagrams together. We suggest the following.

Take all the chakra diagrams from the previous lessons, removing the white background⁶. Carefully fix or glue them all on a long sheet of vivid yellow background paper, one above the other in the listed order, mooladhara at the bottom and sahasrara at the top. The size of the yellow sheet should be such that there is a thin border on all sides, bottom and top, of each diagram. Finally glue a wide strip of black paper around the outside

edges of the yellow background sheet. This combination gives perfect colour matching.

Hang it on the wall. From our own experience we strongly suggest that you spend half an hour making yourself a copy.

Development of internal chakra visualization

You can use the chakra chart as an external method of helping you to develop the capacity to visualize the chakra diagrams internally. The method is as follows:

Place the chart on the wall so the centre, about the area of the manipura chakra diagram, is approximately one metre above the ground. Sit in a comfortable pose so that your eyes are about an arm's length from the chart. You must practise *trataka*⁶.

Gaze at the mooladhara chakra diagram without blinking the eyes for a few minutes. Then close the eyes and try to visualize the same diagram internally.

If you have no success, again open your eyes and gaze intently at the mooladhara diagram. After a few minutes, again close the eyes and try to visualize the same diagram on the mind screen.

If you cannot visualize anything then open your eyes again.

Continue in this manner for as long as you have time available.

On the following day repeat the same process with the swadhisthana chakra diagram. Repeat exactly the same process with each chakra in turn on successive days.

On the eighth day you should be trying to visualize the sahasrara.

If you have not been able to visualize the chakra diagrams, and this will more than likely be the case, spend another eight days trying to visualize each diagram in turn . . . one day's practice per diagram.

Continue in this manner for some weeks or months. It is an excellent *sadhana* in itself. Eventually you should find that your capacity for visualization starts to awaken.

Sitting position

Remain in the same sitting pose as was used for the previous practice of chakra *bhedan*.

Technique

Remain in a comfortable sitting pose. Keep the eyes closed, back straight, head upright.

Breathe normally.

Be aware of the area of the mooladhara chakra trigger point.

Try to visualize the mooladhara chakra diagram. See the 4 red lotus petals and the snake coiled around the lingam at the centre.

Then be aware of the swadhisthana chakra trigger point at the base of the spine.

Try to visualize the associated symbolic picture. See the dark blue background and the 6 vermilion petals; in the centre is a calm ocean on a dark night lit by stars and a crescent moon. Now go to the manipura chakra trigger point; be aware of the area in the spine behind the navel. See the 10 yellow petals on a red background; in the centre is a blazing ball of fire.

Then move to the anahata chakra in the spine directly behind the centre of the chest. Visualize 12 blue lotus petals on an orangey-red background; in the centre see a glowing flame – the *akhandā jyotir* (eternal flame) – see the 2 interlashed triangles.

Go to the vishuddhi chakra in the spine behind the throat.

Visualize 16 purple lotus petals on a green background; in the centre is a white drop from which nectar is dripping.

Move upwards to the ajna chakra at the top of the spine. Visualize 2 silvery lotus petals on a red background.

On one petal there is a sun, on the other a full moon. In the centre is a lingam and an Aum symbol.

Proceed to bindu at the back of the head.

Visualize the big drop of nectar on a dark blue background.

Finally reach sahasrara in the crown of the head.

Visualize the thousand petals radiating outwards from the centre point to infinity without limit.

As the culmination of your practice, try to visualize all the diagrams together. This is very difficult and few will be able to do it.

If you can visualize the diagrams but not together, try the following as an alternative.

Try to see the mooladhara and swadhisthana diagrams together.

Then the next day try to add the manipura visualization to the previous two.

When you succeed in this add the next chakra diagram.

Proceed in this manner until you have built up the entire column from mooladhara to sahasrara.

Then proceed to the next practice, whether you can visualize all the chakras together, or not at all.

Breathing

Forget your breathing. Let it do its own thing. There is no relationship between breath and visualization.

Duration

If you can visualize some or all of the chakra diagrams then you can spend up to half an hour or more with the practice.

If you cannot visualize the diagrams then spend about ten minutes trying to develop the capacity.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 2

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

⁴ Balance of Life: Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 1 and Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 1

⁵ Mooladhara – Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2; Swadhisthana – Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3; Manipura – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3; Anahata – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2; Vishuddhi – Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3; Ajna – Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2; Bindu – Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5; Sahasrara – Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

⁶ Trataka: Stage 1 – Book I, Lesson 8, Topic 6; Stage 2 – Book I, Lesson 9, Topic 6; Stage 3 – Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 7

Asanas: Practice

EKA PADA PRANAMASANA (ONE-LEGGED PRAYER POSE)

The word *eka* means 'one', 'single'; *pada* means 'leg' and *pranam* means 'prayer'. This asana can therefore be translated as the 'one-legged prayer pose'.



Technique

Stand upright with the two feet together. Face forwards and gaze at a fixed point on the wall in front of your eyes. Bend one leg and place the sole in contact with the thigh of the other leg. Using your hands, adjust the heel so that it is close to the perineum. Raise your hands and place the palms together in front of your chest. Keep your eyes on the fixed point. This is the final pose. Breathe normally. Stay in the final pose for a minute or so, taking care to maintain balance. Then lower the folded leg to the ground. Bend and raise the other leg and repeat exactly the same process.

Awareness

Keep your attention on the fixed point in front of you throughout the practice.

Further details

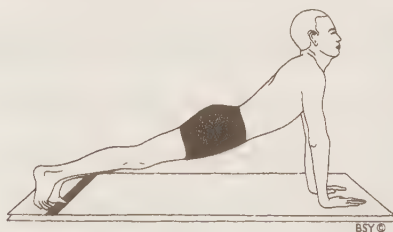
Refer to 'General Details' given later.

SANTOLANASANA (BALANCING POSE)

The word *santolana* means 'balancing', 'to balance'. This asana is therefore directly translated as 'balancing pose'.

Technique

Kneel on the ground. Lean forwards and place the hands on the floor in front of the body. Adjust the position of the hands, backwards or forwards, until both thighs and straight arms are vertical, the trunk being horizontal. This is the starting position (identical to the starting position of *marjariasana*)¹.



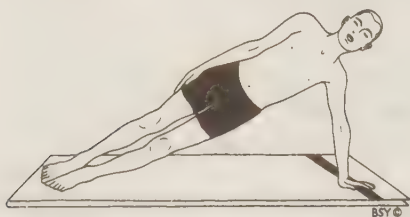
Stage 1

Raise your buttocks. Straighten your legs. Move your shoulders forwards, keeping the arms straight, while lowering the buttocks so that the legs and trunk lie in one straight line. This is the final pose of stage 1 and is shown in the preceding figure. Stay in this pose for a short duration. Then move on to stage 2.

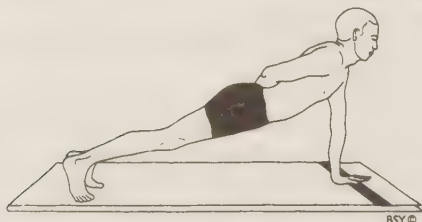
Stage 2

Carefully raise one arm. Roll your body to one side so that your chest faces forwards.

Rest your uppermost arm along the trunk and thigh. This is the final pose of stage 2 and is shown in the following diagram. Then return to the original, face downward position.



Roll over on to the other side of the body in the same manner.
Return to the face downwards position.
Then proceed to stage 3.



Stage 3

Place both hands on the ground; take a short rest.

Then raise one arm and place it behind the back.

This is the final position of stage 3 shown in the above figure.

Maintain balance for a short duration.

Then return the hand to the floor.

Raise the other arm behind the back and repeat the same procedure.

Eventually return to the face downward position, both hands on the floor.

Move on to stage 4.

Stage 4

Raise one leg.

Stretch it backwards and upwards.

Both hands should remain on the ground at this stage. Hold the head upwards.

This is the final pose.

Maintain balance for a short duration.

Then lower the leg to the ground.

Repeat with the other leg.

This is the end of the entire practice.

Breathing, awareness and other details

Breathing should be normal throughout. Fix your attention on maintaining balance. Refer to 'General Details' later.

PADA ANGUSHTHASANA (TIPTOE POSE)

The word *pada* means 'leg' and *angushta* means 'toes'. In English it is usually called 'the tiptoe pose' which is probably better than its Sanskrit name.

This asana looks quite easy but it is actually quite difficult to perform. Try it and you will find out. It requires a very good sense of balance.



Technique

Take a squatting position.

Raise your heels and balance on tiptoe.

Lower the heels slightly to make the thighs horizontal.

Adjust the heels of one foot so that it presses into the area of the perineum.

Carefully place the other foot on the thigh of the opposite leg.

If you find your balance, place the two palms together in front of the chest.

Stay in the final pose for as long as you can comfortably maintain balance.

Then place the raised foot back on the floor again.

After a short period, repeat the practice raising the other foot.

Hints

- Use your arms while trying to obtain the exact position of balance. That is, lower and raise the hands on and off the ground according to need.
- In the beginning practise near a wall which can be used to give support. Eventually,

- however, the practice should be done in the middle of the room.
- While trying to find balance gaze at a fixed point directly in front of the face on the wall. Don't gaze downwards, since this brings loss of balance.

Breathing and awareness

Breathing should be normal throughout. All your attention should be on balance.

GENERAL DETAILS

Duration

Practise for as long as time permits and for as long as you feel comfortable.

Time of practice

All three asanas can be practised at any time during the day. There are no restrictions.

Limitations

There are no obvious limitations on people who should not practise these asanas. You must use your own discretion.

Benefits

These three asanas help to bring nervous equilibrium. They develop the sense of balance and develop coordination between different parts of the body. They all develop the power of mental concentration, which is needed to perform them.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 4

Ujjayi Pranayama with Aum

Ujjayi pranayama is the psychic breath¹. Combined with Aum it is an excellent relaxation and premeditative technique. It is easy to learn and can be practised by all, young and old, at any time of the day or night. You can use whatever position you find most comfortable, as long as the spine, neck and head all form a straight line. Lying down in shavasana is recommended, but no sleeping please². In this practice you must learn to snore without sleeping.

Technique

Relax your whole body and adjust your position so that you don't have to change it at all during the practice.

Close your eyes.

Be aware of the breath flowing in and out of the nostrils.

Move your awareness down to your throat.

Feel the breath in your throat.

Contract the glottis.

Breathe deeply and softly. Your breathing should sound like the gentle snoring of a sleeping baby.

You should have the feeling of breathing through the throat only.

Integrate Aum with each inhalation and exhalation.

As you inhale mentally chant Aum.

As you exhale mentally chant Aum.

Go on practising ujjayi and mentally repeating Aum.

Duration

With practice this technique can be done for hours, although five or ten minutes should be long enough to remove tensions and to relax or prepare you for additional meditation practices.

Benefits

This practice, though it is so simple, has subtle influences on the whole body as well as the

psychic plane. It calms the nervous system and removes all worries and troubles from the mind.

People who suffer from insomnia should have a quiet, deep sleep if they practise this technique in bed at night. They should lie in shavasana, without any pillow to elevate the head, obstructing the breath from passing through the already contracted glottis.

This practice is also very useful for people with high blood pressure, as it reduces the heartbeat.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

² Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8.

Yoga Nidra (Part 2)

Is yoga nidra a method of indoctrination? This is a question that many people ask. This doubt can only be removed through time, practice and a deeper understanding of the mechanics and purpose of the technique. It can be a method of indoctrination if it is used incorrectly and taught by the wrong teacher. You have to be careful when choosing your teacher.

When practised correctly with the right teacher, yoga nidra is definitely not a form of indoctrination. In fact, it is the opposite. The purpose of yoga nidra is to free the mind of conditioning, ignorance, false concepts, etc., not to further entangle it. Its purpose is to expand, open and awaken the individual mind, not to constrict it further. Yoga nidra will eliminate obstructions, not build them up.

The only part of yoga nidra that is slightly suggestive of indoctrination is the *sankalpa* (resolve), but it is a strict rule that the practitioner should choose his or her own *sankalpa*. The teacher should play no part in this stage of yoga nidra but remain quiet, allowing the practitioner to repeat the *sankalpa* to himself. This prevents indoctrination.

If you think that you are being indoctrinated in any way then immediately stop the practice and find a new teacher. This is important, since negative suggestion, and in fact suggestion in any form planted in the subconscious mind, can cause more harm than good.

The role of the teacher is to guide the practitioner through the practice and to stimulate potential that already lies within the practitioner's mind. There is absolutely no need to inject suggestions. The instructor should guide, not indoctrinate.

Yoga nidra does not require belief in anything . . . only practice.

Avoidance of sleep and maintenance of awareness

Yoga nidra means sleep with a state of inner awareness. There is a big difference between

ordinary sleep and psychic sleep in yoga nidra. In sleep there is no awareness, whether internal or external; in yoga nidra, on the other hand, there is wakefulness to the internal environment. No difference, however, will be detected by an external observer.

The essence of yoga nidra is awareness. You should try to avoid sleep (unless you suffer from insomnia and are practising as a means to induce sleep). Before you begin, it is a good idea to mentally repeat to yourself: "I am going to relax myself completely but I am not going to sleep." This resolution can be repeated at various times throughout the practice. Sleep is very difficult to control in yoga nidra because one becomes so relaxed. Even if you have slept for ten hours, you will easily drop into a state of slumber in yoga nidra. This resolve will help to maintain awareness.

Sleep is not yoga nidra. You have to maintain second to second awareness, keep alert and sharp, but without excessive tension. You must find the balance between too much effort and no effort. One leads to more tension and the other to sleep.

When you practise you will find that there will be fluctuation between periods of awareness and unawareness. Gradually as you master the practice and the mind becomes progressively calmed you will be able to maintain awareness. You will maintain inner awareness even though the external perceptions have been gradually dimmed. You will cross the threshold and experience spontaneous internal awareness, the purpose of yoga nidra. From this point you will be able to observe the subconscious and superconscious aspect of the mind. At this stage the techniques of yoga nidra, used to attain this state, can be discarded.

The method of maintaining awareness is to fix your attention on the sound of the instructor's voice and the mechanics of the practice. This is the only way to avoid sleep.

Sankalpa

The Sanskrit word *sankalpa* can be translated as 'resolve' or 'resolution'. It is an important technique and stage of yoga nidra and a powerful method of reshaping one's personality along positive lines.

The sankalpa takes the form of a short mental statement which is impressed on the subconscious mind during yoga nidra. It is a method of changing one's lifestyle, achieving ambitions and of removing negative blocks and mental conflicts.

Past thoughts have led to our present personality, attitudes, etc. Present thought will determine future behaviour. By means of a thought in the form of a strong sankalpa it is possible to change one's destiny.

If you think about it, you will realize that every person becomes great because of sankalpa, whether conscious or unconscious. They have a burning need to achieve something. Their sankalpa brings about a restructuring of the mind and personality. This in turn brings about realization of their aims in the outside world. The small seed of sankalpa, once planted, can grow and produce many fruits. Such is the power of sankalpa. The use of sankalpa in yoga nidra can also be a factor in remodelling your life.

During the practice of yoga nidra the mind is very receptive and sensitive to autosuggestion in the form of sankalpa. It is possible to plant the seed of sankalpa deep in the subconscious mind. Once planted the sankalpa gathers together the vast forces of the mind in order to bring about its fruition. At first the sankalpa is merely a conscious resolve, but eventually it becomes a very powerful subconscious force. This deeper force will eventually manifest itself again at a conscious level and bring about changes in your personality and in your life.

It is important, however, that the sankalpa is firmly impressed on the mind. Many people make resolves, but they rarely bring results. The reason is simple, the resolve is not planted deeply enough; instead it tends to operate at an intellectual level on the surface of the mind. Often the resolve is made when the mind is disturbed and when you feel generally unhappy and dissatisfied. At this time the mind is not ready to receive the resolve. For success, the sankalpa needs to be planted with strong willpower and with feeling. It should also be

planted when the mind is ready to accept and absorb it. Such a time is during yoga nidra.

Choice of sankalpa

You should choose your sankalpa carefully. It should be something that is very important in your life. Do not choose something that is superficial such as "I will get a new car" or "I will become more successful than my neighbour." There are so many other superficial examples that could be given. Choose a sankalpa that will totally change your whole life.

If you want to remove a bad habit, be careful, as bad habits are usually symptoms of something that lies much deeper. That is, bad habits tend to be the safety valve of deeper tensions in the mind. If you suppress one habit, for example smoking, then you will find that another habit arises to take its place. This can be compared to an air-inflated mattress: if you press down one area, then another area will rise upwards. It is similar with tensions of the mind – if you suppress one habit then another will quickly replace it. It is for this reason that we do not generally recommend that you use a sankalpa to try to rid yourself of 'bad habits'. It is better to choose a sankalpa that will change your whole life so that it becomes more harmonious, happy, joyful and fulfilling. When this occurs, so-called bad habits will tend to spontaneously evaporate without effort or suppression. So do not choose sankalpas such as "I will stop smoking," "I will stop drinking," "I will stop womanizing," "I will stop being angry" and so forth. Instead, choose a more profound sankalpa of the type that we have suggested later.

The sankalpa should be clear. Don't choose vague sankalpas such as "I will become free from all evil traits" or "I will try to develop positive, virtuous qualities" and so forth. These are vague and meaningless. They will not penetrate the subconscious mind and will certainly not bring changes in your life.

We also do not advise you to choose a sankalpa that suppresses any natural drives. For example, many people hear that celibacy is a desirable trait in yogic life. This is not completely true, though it does have its place at the right time. Practised at the wrong time, however, it can cause more harm than good. Many people, because of excessive indoctrina-

tion and wrong guidance, become obsessed with the idea of becoming celibates. This is done either consciously or unconsciously. If this drive is in conflict with your natural inclinations then it can cause psychological and physiological harm. This is only one example, there are others. Please don't choose a sankalpa that interferes with natural drives.

You must choose your own sankalpa. The following are a few suggestions of what we call positive, harmonizing sankalpas that can help to lead you towards a happier life if they are repeated regularly and with sincerity.

I will become perfectly healthy.

I will become positive and dynamic.

I will practise yoga every day.

I will succeed in my work.

I will become more aware.

I will find my guru.

And so forth. Choose according to your needs and inclinations. One man, who practised yoga nidra for many years had the sankalpa: "Make me useful."

Do not be in a hurry to decide upon your sankalpa, and choose it yourself. Don't change it once it has been chosen until it brings fruits, and only choose one sankalpa.

At first you may experience little or no result from your sankalpa. But be patient. Do not expect changes overnight. Time is required, depending on the nature of the sankalpa and the depth at which it is planted in the mind. It depends greatly on sincerity and your deep-felt need to reach the goal of your sankalpa. Also, as you practise yoga and progressively clean out the mind, through yoga nidra and other methods, sankalpas become increasingly powerful. In fact, there comes a stage in the life of an advanced yogi when all sankalpas bring fruition. This is symbolically called the *kalpa vriksha* (wish fulfilling tree) in yogic texts and arises when a person reaches the stage of understanding represented by the anahata chakra¹. However, don't worry too much about this aspect of sankalpa; we have only mentioned it for your interest.

Your life can be completely changed by sankalpa. Vast numbers of people have used sankalpas, either consciously or unconsciously, and have attained their aims. We suggest that you consciously choose a sankalpa and allow it to transform your life.

Rules for using sankalpa

To successfully use the power of sankalpa in yoga nidra you should follow the rules below.

- *Clarity.* The sankalpa should be stated in a short, simple, clear sentence form. The same words and the same sentence structure should be used until the sankalpa brings fruits. Use minimum words.
- *Repetition.* The sankalpa should be repeated over and over again in your mind.
- *Sincerity and feeling.* You should repeat the sankalpa with sincerity and feeling. You should say it from the heart, not merely from the mouth. Mere intellectual repetition will not allow the sankalpa to be impressed on the subconscious mind. The sankalpa can only be sown deeply in the mind with a strong emotional impetus. Lack of sincerity will also prevent implantation of the sankalpa; be sincere when you repeat your sankalpa.
- *Time.* Your sankalpa should be repeated at the beginning and end of yoga nidra. It can also be practised before sleep and immediately after waking up in the morning. These are the best times since the mind is most receptive. The sankalpa, however, can also be repeated during any spare time in the day.
- *One sankalpa.* Choose only one sankalpa and stick to it until it brings results. Do not change it.

Rotation of awareness

An important part of the practice of yoga nidra is the rotation of awareness through different parts of the physical body. It is specifically designed to withdraw perception from the outside world, induce introspection and also deep relaxation of the mind and body.

According to yogic scriptures there are seventy-six physical centres in the body. Technically, they are called *angasthana* (limb or organ locations) and *adhara* (physical bases or centres). The latter are mentioned in the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad*. These centres include both the outer limbs such as the hands, arms, legs, etc. as well as the internal limbs such as the heart, lungs, stomach etc. Most of these centres will be listed when we describe the full practice of yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra induces a state of pratyahara (sense withdrawal) in which perceptions of

the outside world in the form of taste, smell, hearing, seeing and touch sensations are stopped. This enables awareness to be directed inwards. The sense impressions are not cut off immediately, however, since for most people this is completely impossible. Instead the practice of yoga nidra is so designed that one's awareness is slowly weaned away from the outside world. In the practice of rotating one's awareness through the different parts of the body the eyes are closed. This prevents sight perception. If one is aware of the different parts of the body, then one will also cease to smell and to taste. Three of the five sense organs will be closed. Only sense impressions from the instructor's voice and the mental touch sensations of the physical limbs will be perceived. The field is narrowed. The mind is rendered one-pointed.

Another important thing to remember is that it is difficult to rotate awareness through the different physical centres and be immersed in the normal chattering thoughts of the mind. Either the internal dialogue of thoughts continues and you forget to rotate your awareness through the centres, or you consciously rotate your awareness and cease to be absorbed in bubbling thoughts. You either do one or the other. If you are practising yoga nidra correctly then your chattering thoughts will stop.

In later stages of yoga nidra, rotation of awareness through the physical centres is discarded. If you have been aware throughout the practice of yoga nidra then you will cease to be aware of the physical body, for the sense of touch will be cut off. The only remaining link with the outside world is the sound of the instructor's voice. This too can be easily cut off by the teacher ceases to speak. If he chooses the right time then you will be suspended in a state of pratyahara. You will be ready to begin dharana as the preliminary for dhyana.

The purpose of rotating awareness through the different parts of the body is to enable the body to be transcended. The mind becomes one-pointed and very relaxed. This induces simultaneous relaxation of the entire physical body. Consequently the whole body-mind is rested. Tensions are soothed away.

Rules for rotating awareness

To gain optimum benefits from the practice you should follow the rules given below:

1. *Perception.* You should perceive each physical centre using the following means: i) feeling the sensation arising from that particular part of the body, ii) mentally pronouncing the name of that part of the body once, after the instructor's pronunciation, iii) visualization of that part of the body. That is, you should create a mental picture.

One of the above, any two, or all three together can be used to perceive each physical centre. If you have difficulty with visualization, then we suggest that you combine mental pronunciation of the name with perception of the sensation from that particular part of the body. If you find visualization easy, then combine it with perception of sensation, without naming any part. You must choose your own method of perception according to ability and preference.

2. *Instructions.* You should be simultaneously aware of two things: (i) the sound of the instructor's voice, (ii) the part of the body named.

Follow the practice of yoga nidra according to the instructions given by the teacher.

3. *Rotation.* Your awareness should move from one part of the body to the next according to the instructions given. You should be aware of the existence of each centre in turn, mentally touching each point. The rotation of awareness must be rhythmical and with minimum effort. Let your awareness 'flow' from one limb to the next. Or it should 'jump' from one centre to the next with the same rhythm as the ticking of a clock.

Don't let your awareness dwell on any part of the body for longer than prescribed by the teacher's instructions. Even if you don't clearly perceive, for example, 'the right thumb' you should immediately proceed to the next limb without delay.

4. *Speed.* The speed of rotation should be chosen to suit the circumstances. In the beginning the mind of the practitioner is likely to be straying here and there. At this stage rotation should be reasonably rapid in order to prevent this mental distraction. Later in the practice, when the mind is more one-pointed, the rate of rotation can be slowed down. The teacher must use intuition.

In any circumstances, the rotation should not be excessively fast or slow. If it is too fast, then the practitioner will not be able to follow

the instructions and perceive each part of the body. He will more than likely fall asleep. Conversely, if the instructions are too slow and monotonous, then he will also fall asleep with boredom. You must be careful.

5. *Circuit.* There are various different circuits through which the awareness can be rotated. It can be a short circuit through the main limbs such as the legs, arms, etc. or it can be a longer rotation that includes the fingers, toes and so forth. As one becomes more sensitive, the rotation can also be passed through the internal organs such as the heart etc. The circuit can be chosen according to preference and available time.

Try to choose one circuit and stick to it when you practise yoga nidra. This will fix a pattern in your mind and your awareness will flow automatically from one centre to the next without effort. If you continually change the order of your circuit, this flow will not be spontaneous. Once you have settled on a specific sequence try not to change it.

6. *Number of rounds.* Complete rotation of awareness through one circuit of the parts of the body is one round. You can practise 1, 2, 3 or more rounds according to the depth of relaxation required and the time available.

7. *The body.* Do not move the body throughout the entire practice. Only be aware of each part without the slightest physical movement.

Try to regard your body as an object that is not part of your being. Feel that the body is outside and separate from yourself, merely an object of study. This too will increase the depth of relaxation.

Visualization

Mental visualization is an important part of yoga nidra practice. Its purpose is to stimulate the subconscious and unconscious levels of the mind. This helps to evaporate suppressed feelings and memories, and thereby clean the mind of tensions. At a deeper level, the use of specific symbols can induce perception of the unconscious layers of the mind, those aspects of your being that are currently hidden and unknown to you. Inner visualization helps to awaken your inner potential and bring knowledge.

All of us have this ability to visualize. In fact, we do it every night when we dream. Dreams are pictorial expressions of the subconscious

mind, and sometimes the unconscious mind. They take the form of symbols and stories and they all have significance. Most of them arise merely to release pent-up inner tensions and conflicts; others may have universal significance and symbolize a truth of existence.

In yoga nidra we attempt to induce dreaming, but dreaming with two main differences:

1. The dreams are controlled, selected and guided. Ordinary dreams are completely random.
2. The dreams are experienced consciously. Most ordinary dreams in sleep are unconscious.

In yoga nidra, the selected, conscious dreams are induced by visualization in accordance with the instructions of the teacher.

The teacher should choose the symbols or objects of visualization very carefully. They should be chosen so that they help to remove tensions from the mind of the practitioner by stirring up old memories. In some cases this mental stirring up with symbols may cause some initial emotional upset, perhaps as one relives a past, long forgotten painful event. Once this initial emotional shock is experienced, the tension is exhausted and there is greater harmony in the mind. Sometimes the symbol that causes the release of pent-up tension can seem to be insignificant to another person. Let us give an illustration.

A lady was doing yoga nidra. Her teacher told her to visualize a red car. There was an explosion in her mind. Immediately she started shaking with emotional shock, but after a short time she felt very relaxed. Later she explained to her teacher what had happened. She had been in Nazi Germany. When she was very young her father and mother had been taken away by the Gestapo in a bright red car. She never saw her parents again. From that age onwards she forgot (or rather suppressed) the memory of the incident. Yet, in seed form, the emotionally loaded memory had remained firmly impressed on her mind. It caused her endless unhappiness in life, though she did not know it. All she knew was the unhappiness that it caused. The mere mention of the words red car while she was in the perceptive state of yoga nidra induced remembrance. She actually relived the past, the time when her parents were being taken away from her. She felt and expressed the emotional shock during

yoga nidra. After a short time the emotional contents of the memory were exhausted. She felt very relaxed. This was the start, only the start mind you, towards a happier life.

This is one example of the mechanism of releasing deeper tensions of the mind in yoga nidra through visualization. All the tensions of the mind, minor or major, can be removed in a similar manner, though generally their manifestation will not be as obvious as the example that we have just given. Most tensions evaporate more smoothly.

When most of the tensions have been removed from the mind, then it should be possible to hold one image in the mind. This is called dharana where one visualizes one symbol to the exclusion of all others. This is a more advanced stage of yoga nidra and leads to dhyana.

Rules for visualization

The object to be visualized should be spoken by the instructor. The sequence and nature of visualization can be one of two types:

1. Visualization of objects one after the other in rapid succession. Sufficient time should be allowed during the sequence for actual visualization by the practitioner.
2. Visualization in the form of a story. The story and associated verbal description should be given by the instructor.

Each of these methods can be used in yoga nidra. There is a vast, in fact, an endless number of variations. An example of object visualization will be given in the following yoga nidra technique 2 and an example of story visualization will be described in technique 3².

The teacher should select all symbols carefully, even seemingly harmless ones. With some people, one should scrupulously avoid descriptions of gruesome objects such as spiders, snakes, deep water and so on. These symbols also have their place in yoga nidra, but they should only be used when the practitioner is ready. Discretion in the choice of symbols for the given situation only comes with the gradual awakening of the faculty of intuition.

Most people find visualization the most difficult part of yoga nidra practice. This is because of fluctuation in the mind and because we do not develop our dormant capacity to visualize. Don't worry if your visualizations are unclear or, perhaps, non-existent. Only

try. With practice, visualization becomes easy and spontaneous. If you practise yoga nidra regularly this faculty will gradually unfold and this capacity to visualize will, in turn, help you to experience deeper states of relaxation, and perhaps even deeper perception and insight into the nature of things.

Reflection

At the end of yoga nidra the mind is very receptive and one-pointed. This is a good time for reflection and enquiry, that is, the practice of jnana yoga³. You can choose any subject for your enquiry, but a good one is: "Who am I?" Ask yourself this question with sincerity, or select any other profound question.

Alternatively, your enquiry can follow the steps: "I am aware of my body," "I am also aware of my thoughts." "Who is it then that is watching all this?" Select your own enquiry along these lines. Don't give up the enquiry in your life until you find the answer.

Some of you may have an ishta devata (personal deity) or a psychic symbol, which holds much significance in your life. The end of yoga nidra is also an ideal time to concentrate on your personal symbol or deity. It can lead to meditation.

Return to normal awareness

At the end of yoga nidra the instructor should give a definite statement that the practice is finished. This should be done before the practitioner moves his body or opens his eyes. A good statement to finish yoga nidra is as follows: "*Hari Aum Tat Sat, yoga nidra is completed.*"

Don't suddenly finish the practice, stand up and perhaps start talking with your neighbour. The process should be gradual so that your mind fully adjusts to the outside surroundings. Keep your eyes closed after hearing the final statement. Slowly move your hands and feet. Be aware of external sounds. Then after a minute or so slowly open your eyes and raise your body. The teacher should give instructions accordingly.

This definite statement and the gradual awareness of the surroundings is a safety measure to prevent people confusing outer and inner perception. Some people, having finished yoga nidra too quickly, found that they walk around in a dream state for many

hours after the practice. They did not know whether they were coming or going. Don't worry, however, this occurrence is rare.

YOGA NIDRA – PART 2

For general details on body position, clothing, etc. please refer to the practice section in the first lesson on yoga nidra⁴.

Technique 2

The practice is made up of the following stages:

1. Starting pose and naukasana
2. Preliminary physical relaxation
3. Simple breath awareness
4. Sankalpa
5. Rotation of awareness
6. Object visualization
7. Sankalpa
8. End

Stage 1: starting pose and naukasana

Please lie flat on your back in shavasana⁵.

Let your arms rest on the floor beside the body. First we practise naukasana (boat pose) to remove gross physical tensions⁵.

Breathe in deeply.

Hold your breath and raise your arms, legs, head and shoulders off the ground.

Stretch and tense the whole body as much as possible.

Stay in this raised, tensed position for as long as you can comfortably hold your breath.

Then lower your body, breathe out and completely relax.

This is 1 round. Do 3 rounds.

Then adjust your body so that you feel perfectly comfortable.

Adjust your clothing.

Scratch yourself.

Adjust your head.

Make yourself so comfortable that you will feel no urge to move your body during the practice of yoga nidra.

Close your eyes and keep them closed throughout the practice.

Place your arms beside your body with the palms upwards.

Adjust your legs so that they are straight and slightly apart.

After this point don't move your body. From now onwards the practice is entirely mental.

Stage 2: preliminary physical relaxation

Be aware of your whole body.

If you are able, visualize your body.

Feel heaviness in your whole body.

Imagine that your whole body is very heavy.

It is like a heavy lump of rubber.

Feel heaviness in your right leg . . .

Left leg . . .

Right arm . . .

Left arm . . .

Feel heaviness in your whole body.

Repeat this process 1 or 2 times.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: simple breath awareness

Become aware of your natural breathing.

As you breathe in, know that you are breathing in.

As you breathe out, know that you are breathing out.

Be completely aware of the process of breathing . . . nothing else.

As you breathe in count 1.

As you breathe out count 2.

Continue in this manner until you reach a count of 50.

Then proceed to the next stage.

Stage 4: sankalpa

Please repeat your sankalpa with intensity and feeling.

If you have not chosen a sankalpa then proceed directly to the next stage.

Feel your whole body and mind vibrate with the mental repetition of the sankalpa.

Say the sankalpa at least 3 times, more if possible.

Say it from your heart, not from your mouth.

Then proceed to stage 5.

Stage 5: rotation of awareness

Now we will rotate awareness through the different parts of the body . . .

We will take a trip through the body.

Remember: you must be aware of each part of the body in turn.

Either you can feel the sensation from each part of the body . . .

Or you can create a mental picture of that part of the body . . .

Or you can mentally name that part of the body once.

Choose for yourself.

Please remain alert and aware of the instructions.

Don't try too hard.

First be aware of your right hand . . . then right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all the fingers together, the palm, back of the right hand, wrist, elbow, right shoulder, armpit, right side of the waist, right buttock, right thigh, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the right foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all the toes together . . .

Be aware . . .

Now the left side . . .

Left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all the fingers together, the palm, back of the left hand, wrist, elbow, left shoulder, armpit, left side of the waist, left buttock, left thigh, be aware of the left thigh, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the left foot, big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all the toes together . . .

Be alert . . .

Now the back . . .

Right buttock, left buttock, both buttocks together, right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, both shoulder blades together, the spine from top to bottom, back of the head, top of the head, forehead, right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre, right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, right cheek, left cheek, the nose, upper lip, lower lip, both lips together, the chin, the throat, right side of the chest, left side of the chest, the whole chest, the navel, right side of the abdomen, left side of the abdomen, the whole abdomen . . .

Be aware . . .

Now the major limbs . . .

Whole right leg, whole left leg, both legs together, right arm, left arm, both arms together, the head . . .

The whole body . . .

The whole body . . .

The whole body.

Please maintain awareness.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do 1 or 2 more complete rounds according to time available.

Do not move your body.

Be aware.

Right hand, right hand thumb . . . etc.

Do 2 or 3 complete rounds.

Stage 6: object visualization

Try to visualize the following objects to the best of your ability:

Shivalingam . . . standing Christ . . . Buddha in meditation . . . a burning candle . . . look into the centre of the flame . . . a pyramid . . . banyan tree . . . a car moving along a road . . . the car is red . . . coloured clouds . . . red clouds . . . white clouds . . . grey clouds . . . full moon . . . a dog . . . a playful cat . . . an elephant . . . a horse . . . the rising sun . . . a big pond . . . a lotus . . . the bank of a fast flowing river . . . a small sailing boat . . . an aeroplane in flight . . . a bird in flight . . . a red triangle . . . a golden spiderweb covered in dew . . . a dead body . . . a cross over a church . . . a temple bell ringing . . . an old house . . . a goat . . . a shining symbol of Aum . . . chimney smoke rising on a cold winter's day . . . a glowing fire inside a house . . . torrential rain . . . snow-capped mountain . . . birds flying across the sunset . . . waves breaking on a deserted beach . . . hear the pounding of the waves . . . be aware of the immensity of the sea . . . be aware of a calm sea on a warm summer's day . . . feel the calmness yet hidden power within the sea . . .

This is like your mind.

Stage 7: sankalpa

Please repeat your sankalpa, the same sankalpa that you repeated at the beginning of yoga nidra. Say it at least 3 times with feeling.

Stage 8: end

Completely cease all practice.

Be aware of your mind.

Say to yourself mentally: *Hari Aum Tat Sat, this is the end of yoga nidra.*

Slowly move your hands.

Slowly move your feet.

Be aware of the outside sounds.

Open your eyes.

If you feel relaxed, and you have time available, you can remain in the lying position, otherwise raise your body to the upright pose².

Notes

¹ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 4

³ Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

⁴ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5

⁵ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

Daily Practice Program

In this lesson we have introduced two new kriyas – chakra bhedan and sushumna darshana (kriya nos. 14 and 15). If you have the time integrate them into practice program 1. If you do not have the time choose either program 2, 3 or 4 instead.

Try to master one of the balancing asanas included in this lesson. They will help increase

the power of mental concentration as an aid to both meditation and day to day life.

The benefits of yoga nidra are well worth your spending time each day practising it, especially in the evening after returning home from work.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours 44 minutes	
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Kriya 10: Naumukhi Mudra	5
Kriya 11: Shakti Chalini	5
Kriya 12: Shambhavi	11
Kriya 13: Amrit Pan	5
Kriya 14: Chakra Bhedan	20
Kriya 15: Sushumna Darshana	10
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Program 2: shortened kriya practice
Practise as many of the above kriyas as you can.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Ujjayi with Aum	10
Yoga Nidra	20
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	3
Matsyasana	3
Ujjayi with Aum	6
	30

Lesson 35

When the tongue enters the inner palate, then that is khechari. By the practice of khechari also the state of unmani occurs.

The midbrow is the seat of Shiva, who consumes the mental awareness. When the awareness is consumed in that centre, one loses awareness of time.

The practice of khechari should be continued thus, then yoga nidra will dawn. Upon attaining yoga nidra one loses awareness of time.

—*Hatha Yoga Pradipika* (4:47–49)

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 16: PRANA AHUTI (INFUSING THE DIVINE PRANA)

The Sanskrit word *prana* means many things. Basically, it means energy at all levels, whether subtle or gross. In its most gross form it can be interpreted as matter, since, as Einstein concluded, matter is merely localized and 'solid' energy. Atomic physicists are investigating this type of prana when they split the atom. In man, this level of prana is called the *annamaya kosha* (the sheath that is produced from food). It is the physical body. It is this type of prana called matter that most people can understand. Moreover, it is the physical body that most identify with as being predominantly the 'I'.

At a slightly more subtle level there is prana or energy that coordinates 'physical energy' or matter. In modern scientific terminology it is widely called bioplasmic or bioluminescent energy. It is also called odic force, vital energy and an assortment of other names. This type of prana streams through everything from the smallest pebble to the mightiest galaxy, from the tiniest insect to man. It is the link between mind and matter. In man, this level of energy is collectively called the *pranamaya kosha* (the vital or etheric sheath). Most people in yogic circles tend to understand only this level of energy as being prana. There is no objection to this, but by our definition prana encompasses all types of energy. Few people seem to be able to identify this aspect of their being, but if it is out of balance, then they will certainly feel the effects in the form of illness and fatigue. Bioplasmic energy is a part of our human framework, and can certainly be experienced and known when one's perception becomes more sharp.

Even more subtle than bioplasmic energy is prana in the form of mental energy. This controls both the physical and the bioplasmic energies in the universe, whether in the form of stones, plants, animals or anything that

exists in any shape or form. In Sanskrit, it is called the *manomaya kosha* (the mental sheath). This level of prana is experienced by all humans in the form of thought. Moreover, it is the mind, together with the physical body, that most people identify with and regard as being the entire 'I'.

Prana also exists and functions at even more subtle levels, but we will stop at this stage. It is sufficient to say that prana is the energy that underlies the entire manifested universe and all that it contains, whether visible or invisible, tangible or intangible. It is also called Shakti, and in India the various types and aspects of prana are represented by multitudes of deities such as Durga, Kali, Uma and so on. These deities are worshipped because the prana symbolized by these deities can bring either auspicious or inauspicious changes into one's life.

Without prana, nothing can exist or function. Everything is prana in a myriad of different shapes and forms. Without prana there is no life. Furthermore, without prana it is not possible to practise yoga. It is pranic flow that allows one to practise asanas, pranayama, karma yoga, bhakti yoga and so forth. Meditation cannot arise without an injection of subtle prana. And the flow is spontaneous. It happens; one cannot really make it happen.

Kriya number 16 is called *prana ahuti*. The word *ahuti* means 'infusion' or 'injection'. This practice can therefore be translated as 'the infusion of subtle prana'. You will not succeed in kriya yoga meditation without this prana. It is grace that allows this prana to infuse your whole being. Prana ahuti invokes this inflow of supercharged divine energy that will take one into a new dimension of being. The practice is both symbolic and invocative.

Sitting position

Sit in the same pose as the previous practice; that is, kriya number 15, sushumna darshana'.

Try not to move your body at all unless pain or discomfort is unbearable. Any comfortable sitting asana is suitable, but padmasana, siddhasana and siddha yoni asana are preferred².



Technique

Remain sitting comfortably.
Keep the eyes closed.
Let the breathing be normal.
Imagine that there is a divine hand on your head.
Feel the soft touch.
Feel that the hand is infusing subtle prana into your body and mind.
The prana is cascading down the spine.
At first you may need to use some imagination, but with practice you will actually feel a powerful energy current flowing downwards.
The energy is difficult to describe, but it may be experienced as a wave of cold or heat, as an electric current, a stream of liquid, or a tickling sensation.
You may begin to shake and shudder slightly, but don't worry.
Eventually you will feel the prana penetrate the mooladhara chakra.
This is the end of the practice. Immediately proceed to the next practice – utthan.

Breathing

Normal breathing throughout the practice.

Awareness

Be aware only of the prana infusing the body and flowing down the spine.

Duration

You should practise until you feel the prana that enters the top of the spine pierce the

mooladhara. If you are very sensitive to this current then the practice may take only 1 minute. If you are less sensitive then you may have to spend a little longer. But do not spend more than 3 minutes on the practice, whether you feel the prana current piercing the spine and mooladhara or not. Pass on to the next kriya.

KRIYA 17: UTTAN (RAISING THE KUNDALINI)

The word *utthan* means 'ascent', 'rising'. In the context of this practice it refers to the raising of the kundalini. In English, this kriya can be called 'raising the kundalini'. It is the seventeenth kriya and comes immediately after prana ahuti.

Sitting position

Remain in the same sitting position that was used for the previous kriya.

Visualization

This kriya requires mental visualization of a snake and a shivalingam³. The practice becomes more powerful as the clarity of the image increases. At first you will probably find visualization difficult. Don't worry – persevere with your regular practice and you will find that the image will show itself and increase in clarity.



Technique

Remain in a comfortable sitting pose with your eyes closed.
Let your breathing remain normal.
Fix your awareness at the mooladhara chakra.
Try to clearly visualize a shivalingam in that region; it is black and made of a smoky, gaseous substance.

Both the bottom and the top of the lingam are cut off as shown.

The lingam is encircled $3\frac{1}{2}$ times by a red baby snake.

Its head is curved over the top of the lingam.

The snake is trying to uncoil and release itself; it is trying to ascend.

Eventually it begins to ascend through the spinal passage, making an angry, hissing sound.

Try to intensify your visualization.

The tail of the snake remains fixed at the base of the lingam.

The head and body of the snake move upwards, but may slip downwards again.

Let the snake move up and down; do not interfere.

You may find that the lingam and snake move their positions in the body; they may move to one of the other chakras, or the sahasrara.

Visualize the lingam and snake at any place to which it moves.

The ascending snake has a very large head, the same width as your physical body; it is not a cobra.

Continue the practice.

After some time you may feel as though the body contracts.

You may feel bliss.

At this stage proceed to the next kriya – swaroopa darshana⁴.

Breathing

Normal breathing throughout the practice.

Awareness

Be aware of the lingam and the movement of the snake.

Duration

Practise until you feel intense bliss. If this does not arise, practise for about 5 minutes. Then immediately start the next practice.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 34, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 5

⁴ Book III, Lesson 36, Topic 2

Asanas: Practice

Here we will describe three of a number of variations of *sirshasana*, the headstand pose¹:

1. Salamba sirshasana
2. Niralamba sirshasana
3. Oordhwa padmasana.

Generally, we recommend sirshasana in its basic form; rarely do we teach its variations. But many yoga enthusiasts will find the variations well worth practising since they have definite characteristics and uses of their own. It is for this reason that we will discuss them here.

SALAMBA SIRSHASANA (SUPPORTED HEADSTAND POSE)

The word *salamba* means 'with support, supported'. In English, this asana can be called 'supported headstand pose'. It is so called because the hands and arms are actively used to maintain the final pose.

Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor.
Kneel on the floor.

Lean forwards. Place the head on the blanket so that the point of contact is midway between the forehead and the crown of the head.

Place the palms flat on the ground so that they lie on either side of the body, fingers pointing forwards.

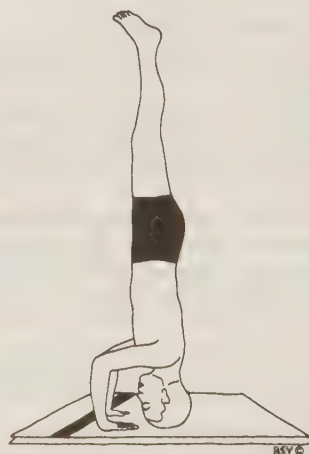
Adjust the position of the hands, so that, together with the head, they form the corners of an equilateral triangle.

The forearms should be vertical as shown in the accompanying picture.

Raise your knees. Straighten both legs, keeping them together.

Move both feet slowly forwards on tiptoe until your back is vertical; don't overbalance backwards.

When you feel that most of the body weight is supported on the head then this indicates that the back is vertical.



Get ready to raise your body into the inverted pose.

Keeping both legs straight and together, slowly raise them upwards using the arm muscles. Raise them until they are vertical and the whole body is inverted. Do not lose balance. The final pose is shown above.

Keep the spine and legs in one vertical straight line.

Breathe normally.

Stay in the final pose for as long as you feel comfortable, no longer.

Then slowly return to the starting pose by lowering the legs; the whole movement should be done smoothly, with control.

Stay in the kneeling position, head down, for about 30 seconds.

Then do the counterpose – *tadasana*².

Breathing

Retain the breath while raising and lowering the legs. Breathe normally in the final pose.

Comparison with basic sirshasana

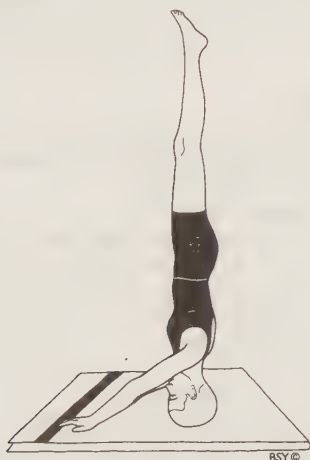
Salamba sirshasana is less stable than basic sirshasana. This means that it is more difficult

to stay in the final pose for protracted periods of time. Furthermore, the final pose of salamba sirshasana is not as comfortable as sirshasana. Therefore, those who want to invert the body for periods of greater than, say, two to three minutes should do sirshasana not salamba sirshasana.

Salamba sirshasana, however, has the advantage that it is much easier to raise the body into the final position. It is therefore ideal for beginners.

NIRALAMBA SIRSHASANA (UNSUPPORTED HEADSTAND POSE)

The word *niralamba* means 'without support' or 'unsupported'. In English this asana can be translated as 'the unsupported headstand pose'. It is so called because the arms provide very little support to the inverted body in the final pose.



Technique

Place a folded blanket on the floor.

Kneel on the ground.

Place the head on the top of the blanket, adjusting it so that the contact point is the mid-point between the forehead and crown of the head.

Stretch the arms backwards so that they are straight and in line with each side of the body. The palms should face upwards with the back of the hands resting on the ground.

The distance between the two hands should be about the same as between the two shoulders.

Straighten the legs, allowing the weight of the body to be supported by the hands, feet and head.

Progressively move the two feet towards the face, keeping the legs straight, until the trunk is vertical.

Steady the body and prepare to raise the legs. Apply pressure between the back of the hands and the floor and slowly raise the legs, keeping them straight.

Ensure that you maintain balance.

Slowly and without jerking, raise the legs to the vertical position.

In the final pose the whole body should be in one straight vertical line.

Be careful not to overbalance.

Maintain equilibrium by pressing the hands against the floor as required.

Let all the weight of the body be sustained by the top of the head.

Breathe normally.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable period of time.

Then slowly and carefully lower the legs to the ground.

Remain with the head down in the kneeling pose for about 30 seconds.

Then do tadasana, the counterpose².

This is the end of the practice.

Breathing

Retain the breath while raising and lowering the legs. Breathe normally in the final pose.

Other practical details

For other details on practice refer to 'General Details' later.

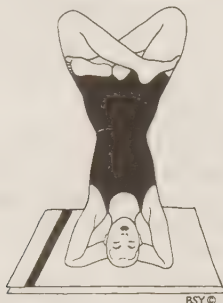
Comparison with basic sirshasana

Niralamba sirshasana is more difficult than sirshasana; therefore it should not be practised until sirshasana has been fully mastered. It requires a much greater sense of balance than sirshasana. The final pose is very unstable compared to sirshasana, and therefore it is not very suitable for spending long periods in the inverted position.

Practise basic sirshasana to obtain the benefits of inverting the body, and practise niralamba sirshasana to develop the sense of balance.

OORDHWA PADMASANA (HEADSTAND LOTUS POSE)

In Sanskrit *oordhwa* means 'raised' and *padma* means 'lotus'. The English translation of this asana is variously given as 'raised lotus pose', 'bound headstand', 'headstand lotus pose' and 'inverted lotus pose'. It is an asana that can only be practised by those who have mastered both basic sirshasana and padmasana³.



Technique

Take the final pose of basic sirshasana¹. Ensure that you are perfectly balanced. Then fold the legs into padmasana. This is the final pose. Breathe slowly and deeply. Stay in the final pose for as long as is comfortable. Then carefully unfold the legs and straighten them into sirshasana again. With control, lower the legs to the ground. Stay in the kneeling pose for a short duration and then do tadasana, the counterpose².

Breathing

Breathe as described for sirshasana.

Comparison with basic sirshasana

Oordhwa padmasana is much more stable than sirshasana in the final pose. It is therefore a very useful asana for long periods in the inverted position. However, greater care must be taken to ensure that one does not lose balance, since the feet are no longer available to prevent vulnerable parts of the body hitting the floor in the case of a fall. For this reason, we strongly suggest that you do not practise oordhwa padmasana until you are able to do sirshasana without even the slightest difficulty; you should feel as comfortable in the inverted position as you do on your own two feet. If you

want to practise oordhwa padmasana but are not sure of yourself, then do it near a wall.

Oordhwa padmasana gives basically the same benefits as sirshasana, except that the drainage of blood from the legs is impeded. It is therefore worthwhile practising sirshasana for a few minutes before doing oordhwa padmasana.

GENERAL DETAILS

The following advice applies to all three variations of sirshasana. Furthermore, most of the information given for sirshasana also applies to these variations¹.

Place of practice

Practise in the middle of an uncluttered room or close to a wall.

Awareness

Pay attention to the physical movement necessary to raise and lower the body to and from the inverted position, and on maintaining balance.

Counterpose

The counterpose for all the variations is the same as for sirshasana, that is, tadasana².

Loss of balance

The aim is not to lose balance, but if you do you should try to fall as described for sirshasana. For oordhwa padmasana, please refer to the heading in this discussion entitled 'Comparison with Sirshasana'.

Precautions and limitations

Those people who should not do these variations of sirshasana are the same as those listed in our previous lesson on sirshasana¹.

Under certain circumstances these variations must not be attempted. Refer to 'Temporary restrictions' as given for sirshasana¹.

Benefits

The benefits are generally as given for sirshasana: profound and numerous.

Notes

¹ Sirshasana: Part 1 – Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 4;

Part 2 – Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 11, Topic 3

³ Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Pranayama: Kapalbhathi

Kapalbhathi is a technique of pranayama, although some yogic scriptures regard it as one of the shatkarmas¹. It is similar to bhasrika pranayama². However, it has distinct differences in both method and benefits. It is an excellent practice that purifies the frontal portion of the brain, massages the abdominal organs and improves respiration. It is also a powerful method of waking up the mind. After ten rounds of kapalbhathi it is impossible to sleep. Try it! Therefore, it can be used to energize the mind for mental work when you feel tired, and to remove sleepiness early in the morning. It is an ideal practice to do immediately before commencing meditation techniques.

Shatkarmas and Bhalbhathi

According to the *Gheranda Samhita* there are six groups of yogic cleansing techniques. They are called the shatkarmas and are as follows: dhauti, basti, neti, nauli, trataka and bhalbhathi. Included in some of these groups are a number of different techniques. In the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* the shatkarmas are the same as listed here, but instead of bhalbhathi the sixth shatkarma is given as kapalbhathi. Often these are regarded as the same practice with different names but actually they are completely different. These two classical texts have chosen to adopt two totally different practices for the last shatkarma.

Bhalbhathi is clearly explained in the *Gheranda Samhita*: “Bhalbhathi is of three types. These are vatkrama, vyutkrama and sheetkrama. They are useful for eliminating phlegm and excessive mucus from the body. Vatkrama involves inhaling the breath through the left nostril and exhaling through the right nostril; then again inhaling through the right nostril and exhaling through the left nostril. The breathing should be slow and controlled. Vyutkrama involves drawing water through the nose and expelling it through the mouth;

it removes mucus from the nasal cavity. Sheetkrama involves taking water through the mouth and with a sneezing sound expelling it through the nose. Bhalbhathi will make your body like that of Cupid.” (1:56–60)

Vatkrama is exactly the same practice as nadi shodhana pranayama stage 2³. Vyutkrama and sheetkrama are similar to jala neti¹. However, we regard jala neti as being superior in every way. We don't therefore teach bhalbhathi because it is included in other practices. Those who cannot obtain a suitable neti lota may find vyutkrama and sheetkrama useful.

Kapalbhathi is the last of the shatkarmas to be described in this book. It is certainly a method of pranayama, but is included as a shatkarma by the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* because it purifies and awakens the brain.

All of the shatkarmas are excellent for cleaning the body and bringing first class health.

Definition

The word *kapala* means ‘forehead’ or ‘frontal lobe of the brain’; *bhati* is ‘bellows’, the instrument used by a village blacksmith to create air drafts for his forge. *Kapalbhathi* can therefore be translated as ‘frontal brain bellowing’. In this practice, the lungs are the bellows which suck air in and out of the body. Associated with this flow of air are subtle pranic currents. Some of these currents can be clearly felt inside the forehead. They pulsate in rhythm with the bellowing of the lungs; that is, pranic bellowing occurs in the front of the brain. Hence the name of the practice. This process brings purification of this region.

Scriptural references

According to the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*: “Inhalation and exhalation should be done quickly like a blacksmith's bellows. This is the very renowned practice of kapalbhathi which removes those diseases caused by excessive mucus in the

body." (2:35) This is not very detailed and one would have great difficulty learning merely from this quotation.

Posture

Sit in any comfortable asana with the back erect. The best asanas are padmasana, siddhasana, siddha yoni asana and vajrasana⁴.

Auxiliary practices

The full practice of kapalbhati involves the three bandhas: jalandhara⁵, uddiyana⁶ and moola⁷. These are practised together to form maha bandha⁸. Before attempting kapalbhati you should master these practices.

Mode of rapid breathing

In bhastrika pranayama, both inhalation and exhalation were accentuated and forceful. In kapalbhati only exhalation should be forceful with inhalation being completely passive. That is, the breath is forcefully expelled from the lungs by contracting the abdominal muscles; air is inhaled by allowing the abdominal muscles to move passively outwards.

The whole process of rapid breathing should be done from the abdomen as much as possible, the chest movement being minimized.

Technique

Sit in a comfortable asana.

Hold the back upright.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body.

Start the first round.

Breathe rapidly from the abdomen.

Exhale with forceful contraction of the abdominal muscles.

Inhale by passively allowing the abdominal muscles to expand; there should be no effort. Repeat only a comfortable number of rapid respirations – no more.

Then take one deep and slow inhalation.

Next breathe out and empty the lungs as much as possible.

Do maha bandha.

Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable.

Then release maha bandha, raise your head and slowly breathe in.

This is the end of the first round.

If you feel out of breath, or a little tired, breathe naturally a few times.

Then start the second round.

Breathing

There should be rapid breathing to start the practice with emphasis on exhalation. Inhale deeply once. Exhale deeply once. Retain breath during maha bandha. Inhale after releasing maha bandha. Normal breathing if necessary before commencing next round. Breathe through your nose throughout the practice; do not breathe through your mouth.

After completing maha bandha you may find it a little difficult to breathe in. It is as though the lungs become locked. This problem can be overcome by exhaling very slightly immediately before inhalation. Remember, the rapid breathing should be from the abdomen and not from the chest.

Awareness

Fix your attention at chidakasha, the dark space that you will see in front of your eyes. Feel the pranic currents within the chidakasha induced by the bellowing of the lungs. Feel that the whole area of the frontal brain is being purified.

Number of rapid respirations

Beginners should do no more than about 20 rapid respirations in each round. This number can be increased by 5 or 10 respirations per week according to capacity. With practice it is possible to do a few hundred rapid respirations per round, but we suggest that most people eventually aim to do between 60 and 100. There should be no strain throughout the entire process.

Duration of breath retention

Hold your breath for as long as is comfortable while doing maha bandha, no more. The duration can be gradually increased with practice. The benefits will increase with the duration but don't strain.

Number of rounds

It is possible for a person with a strong and purified body to practise hundreds of rounds lasting hours. For the average person, however, we advise that you practise no more than 10 or 20 rounds. If you want to practise kapalbhati for longer periods, then we strongly suggest that you seek the guidance of an expert. Beginners should start by doing 2 or 3 rounds, increasing by 1 extra round every few days.

Sequence and time

In your daily practice program, practise it immediately before meditative techniques. Otherwise, it can be done at any time during the day except for the period of about four hours after meals. Don't practise late at night or you might have difficulty going to sleep.

Precautions

Stop the practice if you feel any discomfort in the form of pain, dizziness, fainting and so on.

Limitations

Kapalbhati should not be done by those people who suffer from ailments such as high blood pressure, vertigo, hernia and so forth. Be discreet.

Benefits

The benefits are very similar to bhastrika pranayama. Briefly the main benefits are as follows:

Digestion: massages and improves the functioning of the digestive organs.

Brain: clears the frontal lobe of the brain by speeding up the blood flow. At a more subtle level it also stimulates pranic flow in the same region.

Respiration: kapalbhati cleans out the lungs. It improves their elasticity and makes oxygen-carbon dioxide exchange more efficient. It should certainly be practised by those people who suffer from respiratory ailments such as bronchitis, tuberculosis, etc. Those who suffer from asthma and emphysema will, from habit and necessity, use forceful exhalation to expel air from the lungs. This tends to induce severe muscular tiredness. Kapalbhati, practised at times other than during an attack, may be useful in making respiratory muscles stronger, as well as improving the general tone of the lungs.

Alertness: kapalbhati wakes up the mind. So, if you have a lot of mental work to complete, yet feel tired, we suggest that you energize the mind with a few rounds of kapalbhati.

Meditative practice

Kapalbhati is one of the best preparatory techniques for meditative practice. It empties the mind of thoughts, emotional feelings and excessive visions. It induces a tranquil, receptive state of mind. From our experience, the

ideal practice to follow after kapalbhati is chidakasha dharana.

Reversal of nerve reflexes

Normal breathing is characterized by active contraction of only the inspiratory muscles, such as the diaphragm and the external intercostals; expiration occurs passively on the cessation of this contraction of the internal intercostals. Kapalbhati reverses this process: exhalation is active and inhalation is passive. This induces a reversal in the flow of the nerve impulses to and from the brain, bringing about stimulation and awakening of the brain centres. This is one reason for the brain-stimulating effect of kapalbhati, at least on a physiological basis. It should be noted that the expiratory muscles usually only come into action when there is obstruction to respiration, or when there is a great need of extra oxygen in the system.

Notes

¹ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 2

² Book III, Lesson 27, Topic 4

³ Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5 and Book I, Lesson 7; Topic 2

⁵ Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 3

⁶ Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 3

⁷ Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 4

⁸ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 4

Yoga Nidra (Part 3)

In this discussion we are mainly concerned with relaxation and psychosomatic diseases. These two subjects are very closely related as we will shortly explain.

In the previous two lessons we emphasized the importance of not sleeping during yoga nidra practice. Here we will blatantly contradict ourselves. We will recommend yoga nidra specifically as a method of inducing sleep.

Tension as a cause of illness

Many ailments are caused by deep-rooted subconscious tensions. This is especially true in the modern, competitive, industrial world. Vast numbers of people suffer from heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, ulcers, asthma, skin diseases, etc. The basic cause is mental tension. That is, they are psychosomatic.

How does mental tension cause disease? The answer is not easy to give, but the following is a brief explanation.

The physical body is composed of a number of interrelated systems. These include the involuntary functions of the body such as the digestive, respiratory and glandular systems. These are directly under the control of the subconscious mind acting through the brain. When the mind is calm and harmonious the physical organs will also function efficiently. With mental tension, there are corresponding negative repercussions in the body. Ill health in one form or another is the result.

Normally, the muscles of the body receive a continuous influx of weak nerve impulses. This maintains muscle tone; that is, the muscles are kept in healthy condition. Every disturbance and conflict in the mind has its corresponding effect on the nervous system and brain. Excessive disturbance interferes with the tonic rhythm of the muscles. Instead of being mildly stimulated by weak nerve impulses, the muscles are overactivated without a corresponding physical need and activity. Continuous mental tension leads to excessive

muscular fatigue. The result is a continual drain of energy from the body and eventually chronic fatigue. This leaves the body weak and vulnerable to the onslaught of disease.

There are further repercussions: the involuntary systems of the body have to work harder to meet the energy demands of the overactivated muscles. The digestive, respiratory and circulatory systems have to work harder to provide more energy. The whole body functions more vigorously at a higher rate. Extra demand is placed on the internal organs such as the heart, lungs, intestines and so on. They are required to function above their normal level for protracted periods of time. Eventually, they fatigue, become less efficient and the general health of the body declines. Often there is a breakdown in one or more of these organs, leading to ailments such as arthritis, coronary problems, constipation, asthma and so on. Tension in the mind leads to the whole gamut of so-called civilized diseases.

The endocrine system also suffers from protracted tension. In our body we have an instinctive mechanism which prepares the body for maximum alertness and efficiency during emergency situations; it is often called the 'fight or flight' mechanism. This mechanism is part of the endocrine system. When we make an emotional response, a chemical called adrenalin is automatically injected into the bloodstream from the adrenal glands. The adrenalin causes contraction of the muscles of the main limbs, constriction and dilation of various blood vessels, increases the heart and respiration rate, stops or reduces the digestive processes and so forth. This reaction is intended for use only in emergencies, but the stressful, competitive modern way of life makes many people regard almost every situation as a crisis. It might be fear of the boss, of loss of respect in the eyes of friends and neighbours, fear of not being able to pay bills, fear of one's

wife or husband and so forth. Under these circumstances, an individual is always tense, liable to sudden fluctuations of mood and in an almost continual state of unhappiness and dissatisfaction. This leads to a vicious circle, since adrenalin is constantly pumped into the bloodstream, maintaining a high state of physical and mental tension.

The whole endocrine system is forced to function at a higher level to cope with the corresponding high functioning level of the body. This can eventually lead to a breakdown in a part of the endocrine system, resulting in common ailments such as diabetes, sterility, etc. Moreover, as the body weakens through tension, it becomes more vulnerable to attack by bacterial diseases.

Mental tension brings many profound changes in the body. We have only mentioned a few simplified examples. The important question is: How can this tension be removed or prevented? Many people use tranquilizers as the answer. But tranquilizers further interfere with the normal functions of the body. They may bring temporary peace of mind, but can also produce negative side effects. Moreover, tranquilizers cannot remove the root cause of tension; they can only treat the symptoms. They do not bring permanent relief.

We believe that the best method of reducing tension and thereby eliminating various diseases is the practice of yoga, in particular yoga nidra. We regard yoga nidra as a yogic tranquilizer. It is a natural method of relaxing the mind and body, and combating disease.

What relaxation is not

Few people are aware of the real meaning of relaxation. This is obvious if we consider some of the methods that modern man adopts to remove tension. As examples, we can give television, radio, alcohol and tranquilizers. Are these effective in inducing relaxation. The answer is that they bring a limited respite from gross tensions while causing harm (and thereby further tensions) in other ways.

It may be pleasant to finish a hard day's work by turning on the television, but it does not bring deep relaxation. The mind is bombarded with images which tend to bring more inner chaos. Actually television does bring some relaxation by providing escapism – or, perhaps,

if the programs are sufficiently boring, by lulling the viewer off to sleep. The same can be said of the radio: the continual blitz by music in the car, in the park or at home provides some escapism and a little alleviation of tensions, but it does not bring deep relaxation. The same can be said of alcohol and tranquilizers.

It is deeper perception of one's inner being that leads to deep and lasting relaxation. The above methods do not bring this; in fact, they lead in the opposite direction: to communal distraction and addiction to the world of external phenomena. They have their use and place in life's play, but they do not bring meaning and real relaxation into life.

Many people say that they are relaxed most of the time. For some this may be true, but scientific tests conclusively show that most individuals are constantly tense, though they are not aware of it. This can be confirmed by observation. Vast numbers of people habitually bite their nails, scratch their heads, stroke their chins, tightly grasp their pens and so forth. Others may chain-smoke cigarettes, talk compulsively about nothing, move about restlessly and display constant irritability. Many of these actions are done unconsciously, but they all indicate chronic tension. We may think that we are happy and relaxed but an honest appraisal of all our actions will not usually confirm this belief.

Relaxation seems so easy: you simply lie in a comfortable position, close the eyes and go to sleep; or perhaps have a smoke or a drink, go to the movies, read a novel, switch on the television, take a few sleeping pills, or even take a holiday. These methods have their place; without them many people would explode with accumulated chronic tension. But they only bring temporary relief from tension. In this scientific age most people are not able to find a method of inducing real relaxation. Relaxation is a subject that everyone talks about, but few know its meaning.

Relaxation and yoga nidra

In yoga, relaxation is clearly defined as a state in which there is freedom from physical, emotional and mental tension. Practices such as yoga nidra are designed to systematically soothe away tensions at all these three levels.

Yoga nidra induces deep relaxation of the whole physical body. The muscles, nerves,

heart, respiratory system, circulatory system, the ligaments, the brain, the eyes, the abdomen, the forehead, the kidneys . . . the whole body is systematically relaxed.

Next, yoga nidra gradually releases emotional tensions that are embedded in the mind. This does not happen overnight, but takes time and regular practice of yoga nidra combined with other forms of yoga. It releases fears, anger, jealousy and other emotions that cause tension. All the emotions are brought to the surface, to conscious perception, and then discarded. They seem to evaporate, cease to cause inner turmoil and cease to have negative influences in one's life. The more that they are removed, the more one relaxes, not only during yoga nidra practice, but in everyday life.

Yoga nidra tackles mental tension, which can be regarded as those aspects of the mind that are based on ignorance and wrong thinking. We are conditioned by the circumstances of life. These produce tension. Yoga nidra slowly helps to whittle away false thinking and ignorance. We gain deeper insight into our own being and the nature of existence. We start to plummet into the depths, or rise to the heights of the mind. The tensions of ignorance are gradually removed. This leads to greater and greater degrees of permanent relaxation.

Real relaxation comes only when you achieve a state of what can be called spiritual awareness. One sees a background and order behind all things, and begins to flow with the stream of life. One ceases to worry. This is real relaxation. It comes through the practice of yoga in general, aided by yoga nidra.

Necessity of a good sleep

Any machine which works continuously throughout the day without rest becomes heated. The body is also a machine. Sleep is a cooling device. It recharges the batteries of the body which have been discharging energy during the whole waking state. Energy expended in one's daily work is recouped. A good sleep is necessary for the whole organism. The metabolic functions are revitalized, energy levels are restored and the mind-body is allowed to rest. Sleep is essential for optimum health.

A good sleep leads to a vast increase in both physical vitality and mental concentration.

One is able to do twice as much work in half the time. Moreover, the work will be far better.

Sleep should be, and generally is, a simple process. One merely goes to bed, lies down, closes the eyes and . . . sleep. This is how the process should be, and it certainly is like this with animals. But for humans in this busy modern world, it is often not the case. Many spend hours trying to sleep, and when they do sleep, they are racked with tension, tossing and turning. The mind remains full of anxieties and disturbances. The body and mind are not rested. Many people wake up feeling more tired than before sleep.

Good, regular sleep is essential. About one third of our life should be spent in sleep. Deprivation of sleep leads quickly to psychosis, hallucination and disorientation, as well as psychosomatic disorders. This has been tested by scientific experiments. So make sure that you obtain sufficient deep sleep. If necessary you should learn the art of sleeping. One method is to use yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra and sleep

We generally advise you not to sleep in yoga nidra. If, however, you have trouble sleeping, there is no reason why you should not practise yoga nidra before sleep as a means of inducing sleep. If you cannot sleep then any method of inducing sleep is justified. And there is no better method than yoga nidra, even though this breaks its basic rule: that is, no sleep. The rules can be broken in this case. But there is a catch . . . do not practise yoga nidra thinking to yourself: "Ah, now I will have a good sleep," for you will probably find that you don't sleep as planned. Your intent will defeat the objective. It is always better to do yoga nidra with the aim of not sleeping. If you are tired and have not had good sleep for some time, then sleep will quickly overwhelm you.

The factors which favour sleep are those which minimize sensory stimulation. These are: darkness, silence, muscular relaxation and a comfortable temperature.

Scientific tests have shown that sleep occurs in the following sequence, stage by stage:

1. Relaxation of the large muscles, legs, arms, etc.
2. Relaxation of the smaller muscles such as those which control hands, fingers, toes.

a nidra is so designed that it systematically induces these stages in the above conducive to sleep. Moreover, yoga nidra velvety soothes away mental tension. It is therefore not surprising that yoga nidra can easily bring deep sleep, even to those who suffer from chronic insomnia.

Yoga nidra is the panacea for those who cannot sleep. Instead of taking sleeping pills, practice yoga nidra. Drugs can have unpleasant side effects; yoga nidra has none. Furthermore, yoga nidra costs nothing.

It is an ideal practice not only for those who are completely tired but cannot sleep, but also for those who are tired of taking too much sleep.

It helps to bring balance between the extremes of too much sleep (excessive rajas) and too little sleep (excessive tamas). Yoga nidra will allow you to sleep if you need it, the practice before sleep can help reduce hours of sleep if you sleep too much. It helps balance into your sleeping habits and therefore conducive to good health.

Difference between sleep and yoga nidra

Although we have recommended yoga nidra as a method of inducing sleep, you should remember that there is a vast difference between the state of sleep and the state of yoga nidra. In Sanskrit sleep is called *nidra*. In sleep there is loss of awareness in both the inner and outer world. In yoga nidra there is awareness of the outer world, but awareness of the inner world is retained. This is the profound difference. Nidra is unconscious and yoga nidra is conscious sleep.

There is also a great difference in the results. Yoga nidra gives maximum relaxation to the mind and body in the minimum time. It is not that one hour of yoga nidra is equal to hours of normal sleep. After a successful yoga nidra practice there is often a feeling that sleep has not occurred. A lady from Madras said that she had not slept for twenty-nine hours not even for one minute. Actually, she slept, but it was in the form of conscious sleep.

She was sleeping without necessarily closing her eyes and perhaps while performing physical duties. Her sleep was of the type of deep experiences in yoga nidra.

It is generally integrated with the rotation of awareness through the different parts of the body. Its purpose is to help induce deeper states of relaxation and to awaken and perhaps relieve emotional knots in the mind as a means to their removal.

The six main types of feelings used in the practice are: heaviness, lightness, heat, cold, pain and pleasure.

These are suggested by the instructor during the practice session. You must try to clearly feel the sensations associated with the above, either in different parts of the body or one part in particular. For example, you can develop the sensation of heat and then eliminate it at will. Or you can try to remember a vivid pain and relieve it. You must bring it from the past into the present and then throw it out of the mind. You create coldness and then remove it; you create heaviness and then remove it; you create pleasure and then remove it. This can easily release emotional tensions from the psyche, ones that have been locked in the subconscious mind. Feelings such as heaviness and heat are especially useful for inducing physical relaxation of the body as a preliminary to deeper states of relaxation.

Emotions, such as jealousy, anger, fear and so on, can also be awakened by remembering past experiences. These in particular are powerful in cleaning the mind of accumulated tensions.

The teacher should choose the feelings and emotions to be awakened according to the needs of the practitioner. This requires intuition.

YOGA NIDRA – PART 3

Duration

You can practise yoga nidra for two hours or five minutes. It depends on the time that you have available and the nature of the specific practice. Sections should be added or subtracted from the practice instructions according to the duration required.

For a reasonably deep relaxation we suggest that the duration be at least half an hour. Practise for shorter durations will also bring relaxation and benefits, but at a lesser level.

Basic rules and preparations

To gain the most out of yoga nidra you should closely follow the rules and preparations. For details, please refer to the practice section of the first lesson¹.

Technique 3

The practice is comprised of the following stages:

1. Preliminary physical relaxation
2. Breath awareness
3. Sankalpa
4. Rotation of awareness with Aum
5. Intensification of feeling
6. Story visualization – with alternative
7. Sankalpa.

Stage 1: preliminary physical relaxation

Before starting yoga nidra, practise a few simple asanas; this will loosen up the body and remove physical tension. If you wish you can do a few rounds of surya namaskara².

Then lie flat on your back in shavasana³.

Make yourself as comfortable as possible.

Keep your feet apart and let them flop slightly sideways.

Keep your arms close to the body with the palms upwards.

Adjust your position, clothing, etc. so that you can practise yoga nidra without even the slightest movement.

Close your eyes and keep them closed until the end of the practice.

During yoga nidra you should listen carefully to the sound of the instructor's voice.

Try not to sleep, but remain alert.

Say to yourself mentally: 'I will not sleep' (unless of course you are doing yoga nidra specifically to induce sleep).

Completely relax your whole body.

Proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: breath awareness

Become aware of your normal breathing.

Feel the air flow into your body and then out again.

Let your breathing become slow and deep.

Simultaneously be aware of your whole body.

Now you must use imagination.

As you breathe in, feel that your body is expanding; every cell, every organ, every part of the body expands.

As you breathe out, feel that your whole body

contracts; all the organs, muscles, cells of the body contract.

Inhalation . . . expansion of the body.

Exhalation . . . contraction of the body.

Be completely aware of this rhythmical process.

At first it requires a lot of imagination.

With practice you will find that the process seems to occur spontaneously.

Carry on in this manner for a few minutes.

Then change the practice slightly.

With inhalation you should continue to feel the whole body expand . . . but with exhalation you should feel that the whole body completely relaxes.

Your body is like a balloon.

As you breathe in it is inflated and expands . . . as you breathe out, the body seems to crumple up like a deflated balloon . . . it becomes completely limp.

Inhalation . . . expansion.

Exhalation . . . relaxation.

Be continually aware of this rhythmical process.

Continue for a few minutes.

Stage 3: sankalpa

Now it is time to repeat your sankalpa, your resolve.

Please repeat it over and over again with feeling.

Feel your whole body vibrating with the mental sankalpa.

Continue for a minute or so.

Stage 4: rotation of awareness with Aum

In this practice you have to feel each part of the body in turn.

You have to rotate your awareness through the different parts of the body.

As you become aware of each part you should mentally touch it with the mantra Aum.

You should try to feel Aum vibrate once at each centre.

At the same time try to visualize that part.

Let us begin.

Right hand thumb . . . Aum, second finger . . .

Aum, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, right side of the waist, right buttock, right thigh . . . Aum,

knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the right foot, big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all the toes together.

Be aware and remember to chant Aum mentally at each centre.

Left hand thumb, second finger, third, fourth, fifth, all the fingers together, palm, wrist, elbow, shoulder, armpit, left side of the waist, left buttock, left thigh . . . Aum, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the left foot, big toe, second toe, third, fourth, fifth, all the toes together.

Go to the top of the head . . .

Forehead, right eyebrow . . . Aum, left eyebrow, eyebrow centre . . . Aum, right eye, left eye, right cheek, left cheek, right nostril, left nostril, upper lip, lower lip, both lips together, chin, throat, right side of the chest, left side of the chest, whole chest, navel, right side of the abdomen, left side of the abdomen, whole abdomen, right thigh, left thigh, right knee, left knee, right ankle, left ankle, right toes, left toes. Be aware and remember to touch each part of the body with Aum.

Now along the back of the body . . .

Right sole, left sole, right heel, left heel, right ankle, left ankle, right calf, left calf, back of the right knee, back of the left knee, back of the right thigh, back of the left thigh, right buttock, left buttock, right hip, left hip, right shoulder blade, left shoulder blade, both shoulder blades together, the whole spine from bottom to top, the whole back, the back of the head, top of the head . . .

Now we will explore the inner parts of the body . . .

Be aware of the brain and chant Aum once . . . the nasal passage between the nose and throat, the tongue, the teeth . . . Aum, the palate, right eardrum, left eardrum, the throat, lungs, the heart . . . feel the continuous Aum vibration with the heartbeat, the stomach, the liver, the small intestines, the large intestines, the whole inner part of the abdomen.

Now the major limbs of the body . . .

The whole right leg . . . Aum, whole left leg, both legs together, whole right arm, whole left arm, both arms together, the head, the whole back, the whole front, the whole body . . .

The whole body . . . feel Aum vibrating in the whole body . . .

The whole body . . .

The whole body . . .

Fix your awareness at the eyebrow centre.

Feel the continuous vibration at that point . . .

Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum . . .

This is the end of 1 round.

If you have time, repeat another round.

Stage 5: intensification of feeling

Now you should try to create feelings to the best of your ability.

Feel coldness in your whole body.

Feel a shivering sensation in the spine.

Your whole body is being chilled as though you are lying in snow.

Carry on for a short time . . .

Then feel heat in the whole body . . .

Feel that your body is glowing with intense heat.

Your body is enveloped with an atmosphere of heat.

The heat permeates the whole body.

Carry on in this manner for a short time . . .

Then try to remember any excruciating pain that you have experienced.

Re-experience it.

Feel the pain in the whole body or in a specific part.

Feel the pain so much that you seem to start shuddering . . .

Carry on . . .

Then remember and re-experience intense pleasure.

Relive it.

Feel the ecstasy of the pleasure . . .

Let all associated thoughts arise unobstructed.

Experience this pleasure for a minute or so.

Stage 6: story visualization

Try to visualize clearly the following story.

It is early in the morning.

You are walking along a beach beside the sea.

You are alone and no one else is on the beach.

Listen to the sound of the waves pounding on the beach.

The sun has not yet risen but it is partly light . . . it is the twilight period between night and day.

Slowly walk along the beach watching the waves and the gradual change in colour of the clouds on the horizon.

Feel your feet sink into the soft, cool sand.

The whole environment is permeated with peace.

You begin to have strange feelings about eternity and infinity . . . unspeakable intuitions.

Continue and feel the bliss of Aum, without a care in the world.

Eventually you reach a shore temple, a very old dark temple.

Slowly walk into the temple.

The atmosphere is pervaded with the smell of incense.

Inside many people are sitting and chanting the mantra Aum.

You sit down beside them.

Close your eyes.

Begin to chant Aumin harmony with the other people.

Your whole being is pervaded with Aum . . .

Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum-Aum . . .

Continue and feel the bliss of Aum.

Alternative visualization

There is no end to the number and variety of stories that can be used for visualization. The example that we have just given is intended to induce tranquillity and elevated feelings. Other stories can be used to stir up negative emotions in the mind as a means to their removal. The following is an example:

Imagine that you are walking along a path in a deserted park.

It is late at night.

You are alone.

There is a full moon and bats are flying everywhere.

Be aware of the sounds of the night . . . eerie sounds.

Eventually you come to a high wall in which there is a small hole.

Go through the hole.

Inside you discover a garden with ornate stone figures, many trees and a big lawn.

Explore the garden . . .

Look into the dark spaces.

Eventually you come to an old well with plants and grass growing around the top.

Look inside the well.

It is very deep.

It seems to be a bottomless tunnel boring into complete darkness.

A spiral staircase twists around the walls.

Slowly and carefully start to walk down the stairs. You seem to be drawn downwards against your will.

The walls are wet and smooth with occasional patches of moss.

Look upwards . . . see the circle of the moonlit night becoming smaller and smaller.

Hear the sound of small animals hidden in the walls . . . squeaks, scratching and rustling.

Now you are completely surrounded by darkness.

You have to grope with your hands for support as you go deeper.

Suddenly you see two large green eyes staring at you.

They suddenly close up.

You hear the flapping of wings and the hoot of an owl.

It brushes past your shoulder.

Then you see a dim light below . . . you slowly move towards this light.

You reach a tunnel.

Run along the illumined tunnel . . . until you suddenly come out on a golden beach . . .

a golden beach beside an infinite sea of peace and bliss . . . experience this peace and bliss pervading your whole being.

This could be a little frightening for some people; for others it may release many suppressed feelings. The teacher must use discretion before using it in yoga nidra.

Stage 7: sankalpa

Repeat your sankalpa for a minute or so.

Then end the practice.

Stage 8: end

Leave all practice.

Become aware of your breathing.

Then be aware of your whole body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes.

Chant mentally to yourself: A-a-u-u-u-u-m-m-m-m. Repeat twice.

Hari Aum Tat Sat

This is the end of yoga nidra.

Become aware of the floor.

Become aware of your surroundings.

Move your hands and feet.

Lie quietly for some time with your eyes closed.

Technique 4: executive Yoga Nidra

This is a simplified form of yoga nidra that can be practised while sitting in a chair. It is ideal for those who want to relax the mind and body during the day, but find it inconvenient to lie down. It is ideal for office workers, executives, people who work in factories and so on.

It takes between 5 and 15 minutes according to the time that you have available.

The method is as follows:

Sit comfortably with your back upright.

Loosen your tie and if possible remove your shoes.

Place your hands on your lap or your knees.
Close your eyes.

Mentally say to yourself: "For the next 10 minutes I will turn my mind off to all worries and cares and only practise yoga nidra."

Let your legs relax . . . consciously relax them.
Relax your arms and hands.

Be aware of physical tension in specific parts of your body and then consciously try to relax each part.

Are your hands clenched? If so, release them.
Are you frowning? If so, relax your forehead.
Is your neck stiff? If so, rotate your head 10 times in each direction, or move it backwards and forwards and then sideways.

Is your mouth tense? If so, relax the lips.
Be aware of all the different parts of the body and systematically release tension.

Then become aware of the contact between your body and the chair.

Try to feel that the chair is merging with your body so that there is no difference.

Be aware of all contact points and then feel the points melt away.

Feel that your body is like a rock or a tree . . . it is fixed in the ground and part of the chair.
You must use a little imagination.

If possible try to create a mental image of your whole body.

Be aware of your whole body . . . try to visualize it.

Then be aware of your right foot.

After a short pause be aware of your left foot.
Visualize each part of the body and feel the sensations that arise.

Transfer awareness to the right leg and repeat the same process.

Repeat the same process with the left leg, right buttock, left buttock, whole back, the right hand, left hand, right arm, left arm, head, your whole body.

This is 1 round.

If you have time repeat another round.

Then become aware of natural breathing.

If you wish you can practise ujjayi pranayama⁴.
Focus your whole attention on the breath as it moves in and out of the nostrils.

Maintain awareness of the breath for a few minutes or for as long as you have time available.

Then mentally chant Aum and feel the vibration permeating your whole body and mind.

Feel the sound soothing your whole being.

Feel all tensions evaporate.

Chant Aum at least 3 times.

Then end the practice and open your eyes.

Technique 5: Yoga Nidra for sleep

Lie flat on the bed, face upwards, legs straight and slightly apart, and the arms beside the body with the palms facing upwards.

It is best to lie on a reasonably thin mattress on a firm bed. Try to avoid practising on a 12 inch thick mattress supported by a luxurious spring bed.

Don't lie on the bed with the specific intention of sleeping. Instead, think to yourself that 'I will practise yoga nidra just to relax the body and mind.' If you anticipate sleep then it is less likely to come.

Then begin any of the yoga nidra practices that we have described; that is, techniques 1–3, but not the executive yoga nidra.

If you practise sincerely and with attention it is almost assured that you will be snoozing half way through the rotation of awareness.

Notes

¹ Yoga Nidra: Part 1 – Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5;
Part 2 – Book III, Lesson 34, Topic 4

² Book I, Lesson 5, Topic 2

³ Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5

⁴ Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

Daily Practice Program

If you are doing the complete series of kriya practices you should now add and practise kriyas 16 and 17; that is, prana ahuti and utthan respectively. The time required to do all seventeen kriyas will be about three hours, though there will be a lot of variation from

individual to individual. And remember: to gain optimum benefits this series has to be practised every day.

If you have time try kapalbhati and any of the variations of sirshasana: salamba, niralamba and oordhwa that we have described.

Practice	Minutes
Program 1: duration 2 hours 44 minutes – extended kriya practice	
Kriya Yoga:	
Kriya 1: Vipareeta Karani Mudra	10
Kriya 2: Chakra Anusandhana	4
Kriya 3: Nada Sanchalana	7
Kriya 4: Pawan Sanchalana	25
Kriya 5: Shabda Sanchalana	30
Kriya 6: Maha Mudra	10
Kriya 7: Maha Bheda Mudra	10
Kriya 8: Manduki Mudra	5
Kriya 9: Tadan Kriya	7
Kriya 10: Naumukhi Mudra	5
Kriya 11: Shakti Chalini	5
Kriya 12: Shambhavi	11
Kriya 13: Amrit Pan	5
Kriya 14: Chakra Bhedan	20
Kriya 15: Sushumna Darshana	10
Kriya 16: Prana Ahuti (approx)	3
Kriya 17: Utthan (approx)	13
	180

Program 2: shortened kriya practice

Practise as many of the above kriyas as time will permit, doing each in turn starting from kriya 1.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Kapalbhati	10
Yoga Nidra (meditative practice)	20
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	2
Sarvangasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Kapalbhati	5
Ujjayi with Aum	6
	30

Try to find the time to practise prolonged yoga nidra.
Its benefits are enormous.

Lesson 36

Yoga – an ancient practice,
a complete way of life.

—*Jawaharlal Nehru*

Yoga: The Path to Perfection

Progress in yoga depends on various physical and mental qualifications in an individual that have to be gradually cultivated and awakened. All these qualifications are listed in a yogic text called the *Gheranda Samhita* as follows:

1. *Shodhanam* (body purification)
2. *Dridhata* (steadiness of the body)
3. *Sthairyam* (determination)
4. *Dhairyam* (patience)
5. *Laghavam* (lightness of the body and mind)
6. *Pratyaksham* (direct perception)
7. *Nirlipta* (unaffectedness; detachment; to be untouched by the woes of the world and life).

The text continues as follows: “Bodily purification is attained by the practice of the shatkarmas, steadiness of the body by asana practice, determination by practice of mudras, patience by practising meditative techniques to induce pratyahara, lightness of body and mind by pranayama practice, direct perception by the experience of dhyana and unaffectedness by samadhi (perfect merging).” (1:10–11) These practices and experiences are the means to achieve perfection.

Throughout this book we have described large numbers of techniques that are classified under the headings: shatkarmas, asanas, pranayama and meditative techniques. They all help to develop the required qualifications in the aspirant to enable him or her to progress along the yogic path; this is why we have always emphasized their importance. A selected number of these practices should be done daily and integrated with other paths of yoga such as karma, bhakti and jnana yoga, in order to bring about a total and integrated change in one’s perception, understanding and being¹.

Kriya yoga practices include asanas, mudras and pranayama. Moreover, regular practice leads to pratyahara and eventually to meditation. That is, kriya yoga practice will help to foster many of the personal qualifications that are necessary for progress. Furthermore,

sincere and regular practice will bring about pratyaksham (direct perception) as a prelude to the highest experience of yoga . . . samadhi. Kriya yoga is a tool, a powerful method that will help to propel you along the path to self-realization.

Notes

- ¹ Karma Yoga: Book I, Lesson 12, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 13, Topic 1; Bhakti Yoga: Book II, Lesson 15, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 16, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 17, Topic 1; Book II, Lesson 18, Topic 1; Jnana Yoga: Book III, Lesson 28, Topic 1

Kriya Yoga: Practice

KRIYA 18: SWAROOPA DARSHANA (THE VISION OF YOUR SELF)

The word *swaroopa* means 'one's real form'; *darshana* means 'direct perception' or 'vision'. What is one's real form? Is it the physical body? Is it the mind? Is it both together? Or something more? No one else can ever tell you. You have to find out for yourself from your own experience. In yoga, one's real nature or form is called the *atma*. In English, it is translated as the self. It is the discovery and direct perception – *darshana* – of the self that is the whole purpose of yoga. Therefore, the name of this kriya sums up the essence of yoga – the direct perception of the self.

Sitting position

Remain sitting in the same *asana* used for the previous kriya. Do not move the body.

Technique

Sit comfortably.

Keep your eyes closed.

Become aware of your physical body . . . nothing else.

Let there be total, uninterrupted perception of your whole body.

Your body is perfectly motionless.

It is steady like a large rock.

Be aware of your body . . . and stillness.

Be aware of your whole body . . . and stillness.

Feel the steadiness of the body . . . and stillness.

Simultaneously become aware of your natural breath.

Your breath moves inwards . . . and outwards.

Watch the constant, rhythmical flow of your breath and feel the steadiness of your whole body.

Gradually your body will become rigid as though all the muscles have frozen.

Every part of your body will become stiff . . . but it is not so much a physical stiffness as a psychic stiffness.

You will be locked in a psychic *bandha* . . . a psychic lock.

Don't forget your simultaneous awareness of the breath.

You will feel stiffer and stiffer, and your awareness will gradually transfer more and more to the breath.

No effort is required . . . the body will become stiffer automatically.

Eventually your body will become so stiff and rigid that it will feel like a stone statue . . . you will find it completely impossible to move the body. At this stage go on immediately to the next kriya.

KRIYA 19: LINGA SANCHALANA (ASTRAL CONDUCTION)

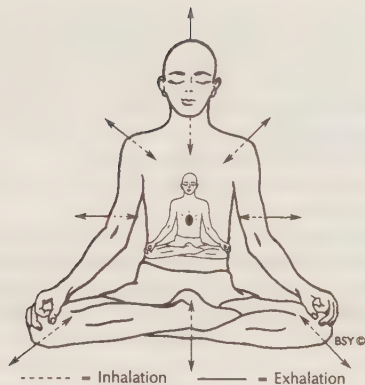
The word *linga* has many meanings and vast implications. In the context of this kriya it means 'the astral body'. The word *sanchalana* means 'conduction' and also 'to rhythmically expand and contract'. Therefore, the name of this kriya in English is 'the expansion and contraction of the astral body'. Using the breathing process as a stepping stone, one eventually feels the expansion and contraction of the astral body. This leads to higher perception.

Sitting position

Remain in exactly the same sitting pose as used for the previous kriya. Don't move. In fact, if you have practised *swaroopa darshana* correctly you will feel so stiff in the body that you will not be able to move even one finger. If you move your body even slightly then the smooth, sequential flow of *kriyas* will be disturbed, the mind will lose its one-pointedness, and the practice will fail to bring results.

Technique

At the end of *swaroopa darshana* your body should be as stiff and motionless as a rock.



Immediately start *linga sanchalana*.

Keep your eyes closed.

Your awareness should be fixed on breathing. You should find that you are doing spontaneous, effortless *ujjayi pranayama* and *khechari mudra*².

Feel that your whole body is inhaling and exhaling.

As you inhale imagine that every part of your body is taking in air.

With exhalation, air is expelled through every cell, every limb of your body.

Continue to imagine this process for a short time.

You will notice that your body seems to expand with every inhalation and contract on every exhalation.

Yet, at the same time, your body, your physical body, remains as stiff and immovable as a stone statue.

It is a peculiar feeling; how can the body remain rigid yet simultaneously contract and expand? The answer is simple . . . it is your astral body that is expanding and contracting, not the physical body.

Observe this process.

Gradually the rhythmical expansion and contraction will become more intense and more pronounced.

The extent of expansion, however, will remain the same but the degree of contraction will become more pronounced.

Be aware of this process, synchronized with breathing.

Expansion takes place to a constant limit, but contraction is becoming more and more. until eventually the astral body reduces to a single point of light.

Your whole being seems to contract to one tiny, concentrated point.

When you have this experience, discontinue this kriya.

Proceed immediately to the last kriya.

KRIYA 20: DHYANA (MEDITATION)

Dhyana means meditation. It does not mean pretty or nice thoughts or psychic pictures; it is a transcendental state of being, the experience of which will transform your whole life.

Actually, *dhyana* is not, and cannot be a kriya technique, since it is impossible to practise *dhyana*. The word *kriya* implies that you practise something and in *dhyana* you do not practise anything. You do not create or make the state of *dhyana* – it happens by itself, spontaneously, when your mind is ready and receptive. Therefore, the name of this kriya is really a misnomer; it should be called 'the preliminary to *dhyana*'.

Rationale

Kriya yoga is very systematic. The first *kriyas* (1–9) are concerned with inducing *pratyahara*; *kriyas* 10–19 are concerned with gradually inducing *dharana*. The last *kriya*, number 20, is such that it should allow one to glide smoothly into the meditative state. Each of these stages is absolutely necessary; they must be achieved before meditation can take place. This is why we emphasize that the *kriyas* must be practised sequentially from the beginning to the end. Omission of one or some of the *kriyas* means that the mind is not tuned to the required receptivity; under these circumstances meditation will not arise. Please remember this.

Sitting position

Remain in the same sitting pose as used for the previous *kriya*. Keep the eyes closed.

Technique

Having completed *linga sanchalana* you should have perceived your astral body as a point, a *bindu*.

Concentrate on that point. You will see that it has the form of a golden egg.

Focus your awareness entirely on this egg.

Gradually it will begin to expand . . . spontaneously.

Watch carefully.

The golden egg is luminous and glowing, yet it does not emit any rays of light.

The egg becomes larger and larger . . . and it begins to take on a form . . . and give off light.

It is the dazzling form of your karana sharir (causal self) . . . but expect nothing . . . and then . . . dhyana . . .

Final recommendations for the practice of kriya yoga

- Please read carefully the general instructions given in Lesson 25 and 26 and try to abide by them³.
- Practise the kriyas in the given sequence, doing as many as time will permit. The order of practice is important. The correct sequence is as follows:

No.	Kriya Name	Lesson
1	Vipareeta Karani Mudra	25
2	Chakra Anusandhana	25
3	Nada Sanchalana	26
4	Pawan Sanchalana	27
5	Shabda Sanchalana	28
6	Maha Mudra	29
7	Maha Bheda Mudra	30
8	Manduki Mudra	31
9	Tadan Kriya	31
10	Naumukhi	32
11	Shakti Chalini	32
12	Shambhavi	33
13	Amrit Pan	33
14	Chakra Bhedan	34
15	Sushumna Darshana	34
16	Prana Ahuti	35
17	Utthan	35
18	Swaroop Darshana	36
19	Linga Sanchalana	36
20	Dhyana	36

- Be regular in practice; that is, practise every day.
- Do not practise if you are ill, or if you become ill. Stop if you have unpleasant side effects.
- Try to integrate kriya yoga practice with other forms of yoga, especially karma or bhakti yoga. This will lead to overall and harmonious transformation of your mind and body so that it can tune in with states of higher perception. Associate yourself

with other yogically minded people. Attend satsang (meeting with highly evolved people) whenever you get a chance⁴. All these are powerful methods of bringing a positive change into your whole being.

- Practise without expectation.
- Write to this ashram if you have any difficulties.

Be patient and sincere in your efforts and you will gradually evolve to understand and experience the real knowledge that lies behind the words of this book.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 1

² Book I, Lesson 6, Topic 5

³ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 2; Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 2

⁴ Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 1

Asanas: Practice

For the final lesson of asanas we will describe three difficult asanas:

1. Dwi pada kandharasana
2. Poorna matsyendrasana
3. Hanumanasana.

Very few people will be able to do these. In fact, we strongly suggest that you do not try them unless you have a very strong flexible body and have been practising asanas for a few years. This will prevent strained muscles and torn ligaments due to premature practice.

DWI PADA KANDHARASANA (TWO-LEGGED SHOULDER POSE)

The Sanskrit word *dwi* means 'two'; *pada* means 'foot' and *kandha* means 'shoulder'. Thus in English, this asana can be called the 'two feet shoulder pose' for both feet are folded over the two shoulders.

This asana is also widely called *yoga nidrasana* – 'the yogic sleep pose'. Those people who feel sufficiently comfortable, and this will not be many, can sleep or rest in the final pose. Needless to say, we do not recommend that you attempt to practise yoga nidra in this position.

Preparatory asana

Eka pada sirasana¹ is an excellent preparatory asana for dwi pada kandharasana. In fact, dwi pada kandharasana should not be tried until eka pada sirasana is first of all mastered.

Technique

Place a blanket on the floor.

Lie flat on your back.

Stretch the legs and place the arms on the floor beside the body.

Relax all the muscles of the body.

Bend one leg upwards.

Place the foot behind the head and the leg under the armpit of the arm on the same side of the body.



Some careful manipulation will be required. Don't strain.

Then repeat the same process with the other leg so that both arms rest above the two legs. Gently press the legs downwards with the arms. Try to cross the feet behind the head.

Place the palms together.

This is the final pose.

Relax the whole body completely.

Close the eyes.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

Stay in the final pose for a comfortable period of time.

Then carefully unfold the legs and straighten them.

This is the end of the practice.

Awareness

Be aware of deep and slow breathing in the final pose.

Counterpose

Immediately after doing dwi pada kandharasana you should practise any backward bending asana such as bhujangasana², matsyasana³, etc.

Benefits

Dwi pada kandharasana is an advanced forward bending asana. It revitalizes the nerves of the whole body. It has a profound effect on all the abdominal organs, especially the kidneys, liver, spleen, intestines and pancreas. The pelvic organs are also massaged which brings about efficiency of the sexual and eliminative systems as well as removal of any associated ailments. The solar plexus and the adrenal

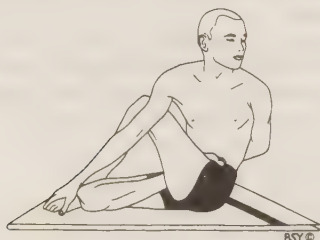
glands are profoundly massaged; this helps to replace lethargy with abundant vitality.

Dwi pada kandharasana brings many benefits to those who are able to do it.

POORNA MATSYENDRASANA (FULL SPINAL TWIST POSE)

Matsyendrasana is named after the great yogi Matsyendranath. The word *poorna* means 'full', 'complete'; this asana is the complete form of Matsyendranath's asana. In English, it is usually called 'full spinal twist pose'.

Most people will be able to do ardha matsyendrasana, the half spinal twist pose⁴, but few will be able to do the full form.



Technique

Sit on the ground.

Stretch both legs in front of the body.

Place the left foot on the right hip joint, as near the side of the waist as possible.

The left thigh should remain flat on the floor.

Bend the right leg and raise the knee.

Place the right foot on the left side of the left knee, keeping the sole flat on the ground.

Carefully twist the spine to the right hand side.

Try to place the left armpit against the right side of the raised right knee.

If possible, grasp the right ankle with the left hand.

Please don't strain – this final twist is not easy. Straighten the left arm and line it up with the right calf.

Place the right arm behind the back.

This is the final pose.

Twist the head to the right.

Close the eyes.

Breathe slowly.

Stay in the final pose for as long as it is comfortable.

Then return to the starting position.

Relax all the muscles.

Repeat the same process in the opposite direction, that is, twisting to the left.

The left twist will require the same leg positions as described for the right twist, but in reverse.

The entire practice is comprised of a right hand twist followed by a left hand twist.

Breathing, awareness and duration

Exhale while twisting the body into the final pose. Breathe slowly in the final pose. Inhale as you return to the forward facing position.

Be aware of breathing in the final pose. If you wish you can fix your awareness at the eyebrow centre and imagine that you are breathing in and out through this centre.

Remain in the final pose for as long as you feel comfortable. A reasonable duration to maximize the benefits is a two or three minute twist on both sides of the body.

Counterpose

On completing poorna matsyendrasana, just sit quietly with the legs stretched in front of the body, the trunk and head upright.

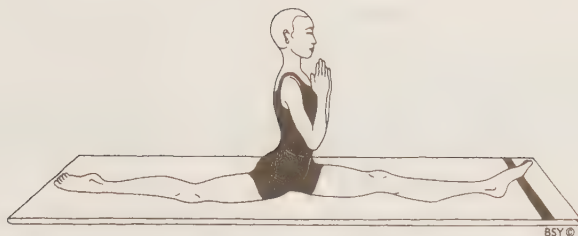
Benefits

The benefits are the same as for ardha matsyendrasana, but accentuated⁴.

HANUMANASANA (HANUMAN'S POSE)

Hanuman is the name of the monkey god of Hindu mythology who epitomizes bhakti. His whole being was completely devoted to Rama. He is one of the heroes in the great epic called the *Ramayana*, which is probably the most popular and widely read scripture in India. It tells of the adventures of Rama, his wife, Sita, and many other well-known characters, including Hanuman. Wandering in different parts of ancient India, Sita is abducted by a demon king called Ravana. Rama sends out search parties to look for her. Hanuman and his companions hear that she is in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) but they have no obvious method of crossing the sea. Eventually the dilemma is solved when Hanuman jumps over the straits separating Sri Lanka from mainland India. Hanumanasana symbolizes this mighty jump.

In English, hanumanasana can be called 'the monkey god pose' though a more widely known term is 'the splits'.



Technique

Kneel on the left knee.

Place the right foot beside the left knee.

Put the palms of both hands on the floor on each side of the body.

Gently and gradually slide the left foot backwards and the right foot forwards; there should be no undue strain.

Simultaneously support the weight of the body with the two hands.

Move the feet as far backwards and forwards as they will go without strain.

For some people, and with plenty of practice, it may be possible to lower the buttocks to the floor to attain the final pose.

Relax the whole body.

Place the two hands together in front of the chest.

Breathe slowly and deeply.

After a comfortable length of time return to the starting position.

Repeat the same procedure with the right leg pointing backwards.

Use of blankets

Very few people will be able to lower the buttocks to the floor in the final pose. As a useful compromise for those who can nearly do the practice, we suggest that you should place a cushion or folded blanket under the buttocks. This will help to prevent strain.

Awareness

In the final pose close your eyes and be aware of breathing.

Benefits

Hanumanasana is the ultimate test of leg flexibility at the hips. Very few can do the final pose, but for those who can it has been found to be very beneficial in cases of sexual ailments and for preparing the organs of childbirth for trouble-free delivery.

Precautions

All three asanas that have been described are advanced practices; they are not for beginners. Therefore, don't attempt them if your body is stiff. Practise other, simpler asanas instead.

People who suffer from ailments such as slipped disc, sciatica, hernia, etc. are strictly advised not to attempt these three asanas.

Notes

¹ Book III, Lesson 32, Topic 3

² Book I, Lesson 4, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 4

⁴ Book I, Lesson 10, Topic 4

Pranayama: Chaturtha Pranayama

Chaturtha pranayama is both a pranayama and a meditative practice. It combines breathing, mantra and chakra awareness. It is a very powerful technique that is not widely taught.

Definition

The Sanskrit word *chaturtha* means 'the fourth'. There are two reasons for this name:

1. The first three types of pranayama are widely regarded as *pooraka* (inhalation), *rechaka* (exhalation) and *kumbhaka* (retention). Chaturtha pranayama is said to be the fourth type that follows them. In this case the English translation can be 'the fourth pranayama'.
2. According to the *Mandukya Upanishad* there are four states of awareness. These are firstly, *jagrat* (waking state), which corresponds to the externalized perception of the world; secondly, *swapna* (the dream state), which corresponds to perception of the subconscious mind; thirdly, *sushupti* (dreamless state), which corresponds to intuitive perception of the collective unconscious; and finally, *turiya* (the fourth – *chaturtha*), which is the transcendental state where words and definitions fail to reach.

Thus, *chaturtha pranayama* is one method, of many, which induces the fourth state of superconsciousness. In this case it can be translated as 'the pranayama of the fourth state'.

Remember also that the word *pranayama* comes from two words – *prana* and *ayama* – where *prana* is bioplasmic energy and *ayama* is to expand into a new dimension (of time and space). Therefore, *pranayama* is a method of inducing a new dimension of awareness by the manipulation of *prana*. *Chaturtha pranayama* is said to lead to the fourth dimension.

Chakra locations

To do the full practice one must know the location of the chakras. These positions have been clearly illustrated in previous lessons¹.

Stages 3, 4 and 5 of *chaturtha pranayama* can be used to develop sensitivity to these chakra trigger points¹.

Pronunciation

In the practice you have to do *manasik japa* (mental repetition) of the mantra *Om*². In this practice the 'A' and 'U' sounds of *Aum* merge into the single sound 'O'. The 'O' sound should be synchronized with inhalation and the 'M' sound with exhalation.

Sitting position

Sit in any comfortable position. If you are able, sit in *padmasana*, *siddhasana*, *siddha yoni asana*, *swastikasana* or *vajrasana*; if not, sit in *sukhasana*³.

CHATURTHA PRANAYAMA

There are five stages. You should practise each one in turn in the following order.

Stage 1: breathing awareness

Sit comfortably. Close the eyes.
Hold the back straight.
Breathe deeply in and out without retention. One round equals exhalation and inhalation. Do as many rounds as time permits.
Let the breath become deeper and more subtle.
Fix awareness on the rhythmical flow of breath. Then after a number of rounds, at least 20, proceed to stage 2.

Stage 2: synchronization of breathing with Om

Continue the deep breathing.
Mentally synchronize the mantra *Om* with the breath.
The sound 'O' should arise with inhalation. The sound 'M-M-M-M' should arise with exhalation.
Remember, the sound is mental.

Breathe through the nose, keeping the mouth closed.

Continue in this manner with awareness of the flow of breath and the mantra.

Stage 3: individual chakra awareness

Continue stage 2.

Simultaneously fix your attention on any one of the chakras, at the *bhrumadhya* (eyebrow centre) or *nasikagra* (nose tip).

Choose any one centre.

We recommend the eyebrow centre.

Feel that you are breathing in with the mental sound 'O' at that centre.

Feel that you are breathing out with the mental sound 'M-M-M-M' at that centre.

Continue in this manner with awareness of breath, mantra and psychic centre.

Stage 4: chakra piercing

Fix your attention at sahasrara.

With inhalation and the sound 'O' feel that all the chakras are being pierced in turn in the following order, starting from sahasrara: ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana, mooladhara.

Feel the breath and 'O' sound moving downwards through the spine.

Then with exhalation and the sound 'M-M-M-M' feel the chakras being pierced in turn from the mooladhara upwards to the sahasrara: swadhisthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddhi, ajna, sahasrara.

Feel the breath and sound passing upwards in the spine.

This is the end of 1 round.

Do more rounds according to the available time.

Then proceed to the final stage.

Stage 5: subtle japa

Again choose any one chakra; the best for most people is the *bhrumadhya* (eyebrow centre).

Continue mental repetition of Om synchronized with the breath, but now there is no need to be aware of breathing.

Be aware only of the mantra and the psychic centre.

Feel the 'O' and the 'M-M-M' sound at the chosen centre.

Continue in this manner for as long as possible.

This will lead to deep introspection and relaxation of the mind.

This is the end of the practice.

Duration

Spend about one fifth of your practice time doing each stage. That is, if you spend twenty five minutes for the practice then devote five minutes to each stage; if you do a one hour practice program then devote twelve minutes to each stage.

Awareness

Be intensely aware of your breath, the mantra and the psychic centres.

Benefits

This practice soothes away tensions in the mind and makes perception introspective, sharp and one-pointed. It can lead to dhyana (meditation). Chaturtha pranayama is also a very useful preparatory technique for kriya yoga in that it develops sensitivity to the chakras and the spinal psychic passage.

Notes

¹ See index of practices at back of book

² Book II, Lesson 14, Topic 5

³ Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 5; Book I, Lesson 7, Topic 2

Yoga Nidra (Part 4)

Most of the beneficial effects of yoga nidra cannot be measured with scientific instruments. This is especially true of the profound changes that occur in the mind. However, various scientific tests have detected and measured the following physiological changes which occur in the body during yoga nidra.

Respiration. There is a dramatic reduction in the oxygen requirements of the body. This is a consequence of the reduced metabolic rate of the body. The respiration rate also reduces – there is slow, deep breathing instead of fast, shallow breathing.

Heart rate. There is a profound reduction in the heartbeat. The blood pressure, both systolic and diastolic, is drastically reduced.

Brain wave pattern. There is a measurable decrease in the brain wave frequency, the change being mainly from beta to alpha activity. The alpha waves are known to be associated with relaxation, peace and a feeling of wellbeing. Occasionally, the lower frequency theta waves have also appeared in people doing yoga nidra. These indicate even deeper relaxation and possibly meditation.

Sympathetic nervous system. There is a detectable dampening down of the sympathetic activities of the body. These are generally associated with stress, fear and overactivity of the mind and body.

Blood lactate. The lactate level in the blood has been scientifically correlated with stress. During yoga nidra there is a striking and easily measurable reduction in the lactate level in the body.

There are various other measurable physiological changes in the body, such as skin resistance. These changes can occur during deep sleep, but it takes some hours. Yoga nidra induces a deeper state of relaxation, allowing these beneficial changes to take place in a shorter period of time.

In the future there should be systematic research into the effects of yoga nidra. An

important field of research and investigation should be the effect of yoga nidra on the endocrinal glands. Another thing that needs to be done is to photograph a person with Kirlian photographic techniques, firstly before practising yoga nidra, then during yoga nidra and after completing yoga nidra. This will give clear indication of the changes that occur in the pranic body, including expansion of the aura. Many people know that this occurs from their own experience and perception, but scientific proof would be invaluable.

Yoga nidra as a healing method

We feel that yoga nidra is a method that should be adopted more widely in hospitals. It can be used to calm patients and aid recovery from various types of diseases by encouraging activation of the self-curative functions of the body. It can be used, for example; to treat the following ailments: asthma, diabetes, headache, migraine, stuttering, neuro-physical disturbances such as neurasthenia, peptic and duodenal ulcers, hypertension, rheumatism, cancer, hormonal imbalance and related ailments, sexual problems of all types.

There is almost no limit. Yoga nidra can help in almost all types of diseases.

It can also be used in the following cases:

- Pregnancy: to relax the body and mind and thereby make childbirth easier and smoother.
- Pain: yoga nidra is a useful tool in reducing sensitivity to pain during accidents or during diseases such as cancer.
- Surgery: yoga nidra can be used as a method of inducing local anaesthesia in certain surgical operations. This method has already been successfully used for dental treatment, minor incisions and even abdominal surgery in such places as Bulgaria.

Fatigue and tension are the cause of various types of disease. Physical, emotional and mental

relaxation is the secret of auto or self-healing. Yoga nidra practice therefore facilitates the self-healing of a vast number of ailments.

Harmonization of pranic flows

Classical yogic texts such as the *Yoga Chudamani Upanishad* and *Yajnavalkya Samhita* explain that there are 72,000 nadis (bioplasmic pathways) in the human pranic framework. Other texts say that there are more; actually the exact number is unimportant. These nadis act as the controlling medium and base for the physical body. Pranic flows have recently been photographed with Kirlian photography and the profound functions of the pranic body are slowly becoming obvious to modern science.

Yoga nidra helps to harmonize the pranic flows throughout the whole human structure. This is especially true during the stage of rotating awareness through the different parts of the body. It is the mind that controls prana, and mere mental awareness of a specific part of the body induces flow of prana to that area. Rotation of awareness through the different parts of the body systematically induces a flow of prana to each part in turn. This leads to harmonization and awakening of the pranic flows in the entire human framework. This factor alone helps to eliminate or relieve ailments and improve health. It improves the vitality of the whole body since this is dependent on a smooth flow of prana. The practice of yoga nidra has deep implications.

Yoga nidra can be called 'yogic acupuncture'. Because of its profound influence on the pranic currents of the body it is a good preliminary practice for attaining mastery of prana (prana vidya).

Yoga nidra and mental illness

There are vast numbers of people in the world who are classified as being 'mentally sick'. That is, they suffer from ailments that are called schizophrenia, melancholia, neurosis, etc. Actually, it is a matter of degree, for we are all mentally sick, some less than others. Mental sickness, indicating disharmony in the mind no matter how small, only disappears with the onset of self-realization.

The cause of mental sickness is disorder or derangement in the mind, perhaps in the form of fears, conflicts, etc. These can be systematically and gradually released during

yoga nidra practice. During sufficiently deep states of relaxation one starts to confront visions, subconscious memories, childhood traumas and so forth. The process can be called conscious dreaming. You may see demons, dragons, ghosts, but mostly things stranger than fiction, and certainly too strange for words to describe. Sometimes pleasant, sometimes very unpleasant, they represent the conflicts of your mind. You have to be a witness. Feel that these visions are separate from yourself. In this way, they will not be re-suppressed.

Confrontation of these mental impressions leads to neutralization of their emotional content. The mind gradually becomes free of these emotionally loaded subconscious knots. The mind becomes more relaxed. Mental sickness gradually disappears like a ghost in the night.

Yoga nidra can also be used to eliminate psychosomatic diseases. There is an interesting case we encountered some time ago. A lady was unable to move the fingers of both hands. She had lost control of the muscles and nerves. This continued without improvement for a few years. Then she came to this ashram and was given regular yoga nidra sessions. During the visualization stage she was asked to imagine that she was holding an axe and cutting down a tree, chopping wood, etc., actions that required her to use her hands. This was repeated in a number of yoga nidra practice sessions. Eventually she found that she could physically use her fingers in the same way that she had visualized. Her mental block having been removed, she started living a normal, active life again.

Yoga nidra exposes all complexes. It removes all mental knots. It can be used by psychiatrists with patients and it can also be practised alone. We recommend that yoga nidra be adopted in mental hospitals and by therapists throughout the world for it has certainly proved its worth in this field.

Yoga nidra as a learning system

We regard yoga nidra as a powerful method of enhancing the learning process. It could be the learning system of the future. It not only helps to awaken the fountainhead of knowledge that lies within each individual, but also increases one's ability to absorb data from outside sources.

Children spend most of their schooldays being continuously bombarded with facts and figures, most of which have no relevance to their lives. Understandably, most children are inattentive and absorb little of what is taught by their teacher. Most readers will have their own experience of this situation. Yet children are naturally intelligent and receptive. This implies that the inability to be attentive and to absorb information does not lie with the children but with the system of education.

Children (as well as adults) learn best when they are creatively involved. But in this modern world most of the child's years in school are concerned with memorizing facts and figures. If this mechanical process could be shortened, then more time would be available for other things, and perhaps the school time could be drastically reduced. A child would learn more and be happier, and the teacher too. This is where the practice of yoga nidra comes in: it can be used to speed up the process of 'swotting' and memorizing the basic rules and facts of languages, maths, science and so forth. This would leave time for more creative pursuits.

Many adults are thirsty for higher education, want to study a language or, perhaps, a specialized subject. Instead of spending years and endless evenings slowly absorbing facts and figures, the whole process can be speeded up by using yoga nidra.

How does this process take place? The basic method is to practise yoga nidra for ten to fifteen minutes before the class begins. The students are relaxed, attentive and receptive. Facts and figures given by the teacher bypass conscious blocks in the mind and directly penetrate the subconscious mind. All the data is firmly impressed on the mind and retained permanently.

This method is currently being used, for example, at the Institute of Suggestology in Bulgaria, headed by Dr. Georgie Lozanov. He calls this method 'suggestopedia'. It uses the yogic technique of shavasana, which is a simplified form of yoga nidra. He believes that the learning process can be speeded up by a factor of about 50, with increased retention and virtually no effort from the students. Many controlled tests have proved the feasibility and success of this method. At the Institute, records show that hundreds of people have, for example, learnt a two year language course

in twenty days. Other groups have had equal success in mastering basic maths, physics, chemistry, biology and so on in a matter of weeks. The technique is being adopted by people from all walks of life including students, professors and housewives.

The following description of a suggestopedia session is extracted from a book called *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder.

"In a typical classroom at the Institute, twelve people – students, housewives, labourers, professional people, old and young – relax in reclining chairs that resemble aeroplane seats. The room looks more like a lounge than a classroom. The lighting is subdued to enhance the calming effect. The students are listening to music, gentle, soothing music. They look as if they were at a concert, completely wrapped up in the harmony of sounds.

"In actuality this is a French lesson. Against the background of Brahms or Beethoven, the voice of the teacher seems sometimes business-like, as if ordering work to be done, sometimes soft and calm, then unexpectedly hard and commanding. Her voice repeats in a special rhythm, on a special scale of intonation, French words, idioms and their translations. But the students are not really listening. They have been warned not to pay attention, not to think about whether they hear the teacher. 'Relax – don't think about anything.' The conscious mind is to be totally occupied with the music.

"The next day surprised students discover that even though they were sure they had learnt nothing, they remember and can easily read, write and speak from 120 to 150 new words absorbed during the two hour session. In the same way, the toughest part of the language course, the grammar rules, painlessly take root in the mind of music-lulled students. In less than a month, students with no prior knowledge of the language have two to three thousand words and have a good grasp of the grammar. Tests a year later show that they still know all the material they learned in this incredibly effortless way."

This is only one example of modern research on learning methods. It is a pointer for the future and it is closely related to yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra relaxes the mind and allows it to absorb knowledge like a sponge absorbs water. The learning process is not physically

or mentally tiring; in fact, it is effortless and enjoyable. If it can increase memory power by 50 times, that is 5000 percent, then it is well worth adopting on a large scale.

Yoga nidra needs to be fully investigated in relation to education. We would like to see yoga nidra, as well as yoga methods in general, introduced into schools and integrated into the daily curriculum. We already know of a few progressive teachers who give a short yoga nidra session of about five minutes, to their children before starting class. They have found that the absorption, attention span and interest of the children is indeed greatly improved. The short yoga nidra session is well justified. Yoga nidra will help transform 'fact factories', as schools and colleges are known, into centres of creativity. Yoga nidra and associated techniques can help to revolutionize education.

Awakening human potential

Under the previous heading we discussed how yoga nidra can be used to enhance the absorption of external knowledge. The greatest storehouse of knowledge already exists within the realms of your own mind. It is merely waiting to be tapped. Yoga nidra is a powerful method of awakening this inner potential, the heritage of each and every human being.

Real education means to 'withdraw from within'. It is awakening of inner potential that leads to creativity and deeper knowledge. Each person has the potential of a genius, but this potential is never realized. The reason is that there is a screen which keeps this potential hidden. This screen consists of mental blocks, excessive egoism and conditioning.

Remove this screen and all the inner knowledge will spontaneously show itself. Yoga nidra is one of the most direct methods of helping to remove this screen: it brings about self-actualization of inner potential.

Yoga nidra as a meditative technique

We have tended to emphasize use of yoga nidra as a relaxation technique. We have also suggested that yoga nidra be used, if necessary, as a method of inducing sleep. Possibly this may give the impression that yoga nidra is a preliminary technique for beginners; but actually yoga nidra, if practised correctly, can lead directly to meditation. Yoga nidra is, in fact, a powerful meditative technique.

All meditative techniques are intended to induce pratyahara (sense withdrawal) as a preliminary to dharana (concentration). Yoga nidra does this very systematically; in fact, it is probably the most systematic of all meditative techniques. First of all the *karmendriyas* (organs of action) are put out of action: hands, feet, etc. Then most of the *jnanendriyas* (organs of sense knowledge) are put out of action; that is sight, taste and so on are blocked, leaving only perception of hearing and touch. Stimulation of the brain is drastically reduced. The field of perception and awareness is narrowed; the mind becomes very one-pointed and this leads to dharana.

At the stage of dharana one should fix awareness on a psychic symbol. This can be done at a suitable stage of yoga nidra. As concentration deepens, dharana is transformed into dhyana (meditation). One contacts the deeper layers of one's being. One reaches the regions beyond the conflicting thoughts of the subconscious mind. One contacts the seat of superconsciousness, intuition, bliss and transcendental experience.

One advantage of yoga nidra over other meditative techniques is that it does not require the practitioner to sit in a difficult pose such as padmasana. One merely lies on the back throughout the practice. The disadvantage is that this comfortable position can very easily lead to sleep. In yoga nidra one does not fight the mind but systematically tranquilizes it. Attention is not fixed on one point as in many types of meditative techniques. Instead, one is asked to move attention from place to place in the body. At a certain stage the mind will automatically concentrate on one point.

In yoga nidra there are two general stages:

1. *Deep relaxation* of the physical, emotional and mental planes; this corresponds to pratyahara and dharana.
2. *Spontaneous meditation*; this is dhyana.

You can use yoga nidra for any purpose that you wish, whether relaxation, sleep or removal of personality problems. But remember: the highest purpose of yoga nidra is to bring the joy of meditation.

Benefits

Little needs to be said about the benefits of yoga nidra for they have already been discussed in this topic and the previous three

lessons¹. But for reference purposes we can summarize the benefits as follows:

- Relaxes the whole physio-psychological system.
- Rejuvenates the body and mind.
- Removes and prevents psychosomatic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, asthma, rheumatism, neurasthenia, allergies and so forth.
- Reduces sleep requirements.
- Induces sleep, in cases of insomnia.
- Brings deeper perception of the mind.
- Brings joy, wellbeing, fulfilment and contentment into one's life.
- Removes psychological blocks, fears, phobias, conflicts, complexes and so forth.
- Brings about effervescent self-confidence.
- Induces meditation.
- Enhances the learning process.
- Awakens innate inner intelligence.

We could probably list more benefits, but these indicate the vast benefits that you can gain from regular practice of yoga nidra.

Yoga nidra and kriya yoga

Yoga nidra is very useful as a preparation for kriya yoga. An important part of kriya yoga is perception of the different chakras and kshetrams in the human framework. Sensitivity has to be awakened in specific parts of the body. This can be done with the technique that we will shortly describe, technique 6. We recommend this to help with kriya practice.

Types of yoga nidra

There are hundreds of different types of yoga nidra. There is almost no limit to the variety that a teacher can bring into his or her lessons. Specific types can be given to remove diseases, others to remove dullness. Some can even be taught specifically to induce deep sleep; this is an example we have given in technique 5 in Part 3. The practice should be chosen according to the discretion and intuition of the teacher.

The stage of visualization gives the greatest scope for variety. The following are a few examples:

Stories can cover a vast number of different scenes; the only limitation is your power of imagination. You can describe stories set in jungles, mountains, far-off countries; you can even give fairy stories and descriptions of interplanetary travel. Use your imagination.

Objects for visualization are also limitless. You can use any object, but try to choose them by the faculty of intuition.

Aura visualizations are also useful. The aim is to visualize the pranic body and perhaps the golden cord emanating from the navel. This is a more difficult practice and should be done only by advanced practitioners. It can be practised in conjunction with prana vidya (knowledge of prana).

Time travel is an excellent practice in which one tries to retrace one's life into the past. You have to retrospect step by step, being aware of feelings and experiences that arise. The time travel can be through the same day's events, back to a previous year, to one's childhood, to one's birth and perhaps even further. This practice requires deep relaxation and a competent teacher. It is a good method of removing childhood traumas etc. and releasing pent-up suppressions.

Music can also be integrated into yoga nidra, especially in conjunction with rotation of awareness through the chakras. This practice cannot be taught in a book. If you are interested in learning it then we suggest that you contact a musically-minded teacher.

There are many more distinctive types of yoga nidra. In the previous three lessons and also in this lesson we have described six different techniques. These cover a wide range of possibilities which can be used as guidelines to help you map out your own practices. It is best, however, to contact an experienced teacher for personal and direct guidance.

YOGA NIDRA – PART 4

Points to remember

Bear the following points in mind when doing yoga nidra:

- Relax, but don't sleep.
- Be aware; don't concentrate.
- Maintain the attitude of a witness – don't get lost in the mental reverie.
- Maintain awareness of the sound of the teacher's voice; don't lose contact.
- Don't move the body.
- Keep your eyes closed throughout the practice.
- Don't try to intellectualize or understand the process of yoga nidra. Just follow and do the practice.

Technique 6

The following practice is made up of these ten stages:

1. Preparation
2. Sinking of the body
3. Rhythmical breath awareness
4. Sankalpa
5. Visualization – body awareness
6. Psychic centres – rotation of awareness
7. Psychic centres – visualization
8. Eyebrow centre awareness
9. Sankalpa
10. End.

Stage 1: preparation

Lie down on a blanket facing upwards.

Loosen all your clothes so that you feel perfectly comfortable.

If necessary, place a blanket over you to keep warm, or a sheet to keep away insects, as the case may be.

Keep the feet and legs a little apart.

Place the arms beside your body, palms facing up. Adjust yourself so that you feel perfectly comfortable.

Tell yourself firmly that you will not move your body throughout the practice.

Make a determined vow not to sleep (unless you are specifically practising to induce sleep). Then proceed to the next stage.

Stage 2: sinking of the body

Look at the space in front of your closed eyes. Imagine that the space surrounds your whole body.

Imagine that your body is immersed in that space.

Simultaneously be aware of your body . . . it feels very light . . .

as light as a leaf . . . falling from a tree.

Imagine that your body is slowly sinking in the space that you see in front of your closed eyes . . . like a falling leaf.

Your body is sinking . . . sinking. . . sinking.

Slowly your body sinks into the depths.

Be aware of this feeling.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

Then proceed to stage 3.

Stage 3: rhythmical breath awareness

Become aware of your breathing . . . at the navel.

As you breathe in count 1.

As you breathe out count 2.

As you breathe in imagine that you are pulling in air through the navel.

As you breathe out, imagine that you are pushing air out from the navel.

It is a rhythmical process.

You should be aware of the up and down movement of the breath and the mental counting.

Count up to 20.

Then be aware of the area of your chest.

With inhalation, imagine that your breath is being drawn downward and into the centre of your chest.

Count 1.

With exhalation, imagine that your breath is being pushed upwards and outward from your chest centre.

Count 2.

Be aware both of the flow of breath and the mental counting.

If you lose count start again from 1.

Continue until you reach a count of 20.

Then become aware of the breathing process at the nose.

As you breathe in, feel the breath being drawn in through the nostrils.

Count 1.

As you breathe out, feel the breath moving out of the nostrils.

Count 2.

Be aware of counting and the breath simultaneously.

Count up to 20. Then proceed to stage 4.

Stage 4: sankalpa

Repeat your sankalpa over and over again.

Remember: it should be a short sentence.

Do not change it.

Say it with feeling, from the heart not the lips.

Repeat your sankalpa at least 3 times.

Then move on to the next stage.

Stage 5: visualization – body awareness

Try to visualize your own body.

Imagine that you are viewing it from outside.

Feel that your perception is outside and your body is an object of study.

You may find visualization difficult . . . don't worry, only do your best.

If you wish you can imagine that there is a large mirror suspended above your body . . . and that your body is reflected in it.

Look at your own reflection.

See your whole body, feet, knees, thighs, your abdomen, your chest, both arms, hands, nose, eyes, eyebrow centre, your whole face and your whole body.

See your whole body reflected in the mirror.

Rotate your awareness through these different parts of your body.

Combine your rotation of awareness with visualization of that part or limb.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

Stage 6: psychic centres – awareness rotation

Now you have to develop awareness of the location of the principal chakras.

You have to discover the psychic centres in your body.

Start with the bottom and progress upwards.

First there is mooladhara², situated for men in the perineum between the anus and genitals, and for women at the cervix.

Try to feel the sensation at the mooladhara.

The second chakra is swadhisthana³.

It is located at the base of the spine in the coccyx.

Be aware of the sensations at that point.

The third chakra is manipura⁴.

It is located in the spine at the same level as the navel.

Feel that point.

Then be aware of the anahata chakra⁵ located in the spine directly behind the centre of the chest.

Feel that point.

Now the vishuddhi chakra⁶, the fifth chakra.

It is situated in the spine directly behind the Adam's apple in the throat.

Feel the sensations arising at that point.

The sixth chakra is the ajna⁷.

It is located at the very top of the spine in the region of the pineal gland.

Fix your awareness on that area.

Now be aware of the bindu⁸ at the top and back of the head. It is the same place where many Hindus wear a small tuft of hair.

Feel that point.

Lastly, be aware of the sahasrara located at the crown of the head⁹.

Now repeat this process but in reverse; that is, pass downwards in turn through the sahasrara, bindu, ajna, vishuddhi, anahata, manipura, swadhisthana and mooladhara.

This is 1 complete round of chakra rotation.

Start a second round: mooladhara . . . swadhisthana . . . manipura . . . anahata . . . vishuddhi . . . ajna . . . bindu . . . sahasrara . . . sahasrara . . . bindu . . . ajna . . . vishuddhi . . . anahata . . . manipura . . . swadhisthana . . . and finally, mooladhara.

This is the end of the second round.

Start a third round, this time a little faster.

As you fix your attention at each point, try to feel a slight vibration at that point . . . a tiny pulsation.

If you wish you can mentally chant Aum as you locate each point in turn.

Do as many rounds as time permits; at least 5, more if possible.

Then proceed to the next stage.

Stage 7: psychic centres visualization

Now you have to try to visualize the symbols of each chakra; this is not easy, but try.

If you wish you can use your own system of symbols; or the symbols that we have previously described (2–9).

Let us begin the practice.

As each chakra is named, try to feel that point is being lightly pressed by someone's thumb, and try to visualize the symbol.

The psychic symbol for mooladhara² is a red four-petalled lotus.

Inside there is a grey lingam around which is wrapped a snake three and a half times, head facing upwards.

Try to visualize this symbol to the best of your ability and associate it with the location in the body.

Then proceed to the swadhisthana chakra³.

It is symbolized by a six-petalled vermilion lotus, within which is depicted a starry night above the sea; there is a crescent moon.

Try to visualize this symbol.

Feel that the lotus is growing at that centre.

Then move to the manipura chakra⁴.

It is symbolized by a ten-petalled yellow lotus; in the centre there is a blazing sun.

Try to visualize the symbol, imagine that the lotus is actually growing from the manipura chakra.

Proceed to the anahata chakra⁵ which is represented by a twelve-petalled blue lotus, in the centre of which there is a bright flame. Try to visualize the symbol while feeling the exact area in the body.

Move on to the vishuddhi chakra⁶ which is

symbolized by a sixteen-petalled purple lotus; in the middle there is a pure white drop of nectar.

Visualize this picture at the vishuddhi chakra location.

Then proceed to the ajna chakra⁷ which is symbolized by a two-petalled silver lotus; on one petal is a full moon and on the other a glowing sun; in the centre is a black lingam and an Aum sign.

Try to create a mental image of this symbol.

Then move on to bindu symbolized by a white drop of nectar⁸.

Visualize this symbol at the back of the head.

Then proceed to sahasrara⁹, the fountainhead of all the chakras.

It is represented by an infinitely petalled lotus of all colours; in the centre is a white lingam. Visualize this symbol at the crown of the head. Then again visualize the symbols in the opposite order . . .

sahasrara . . . bindu . . . ajna . . . vishuddhi . . .

anahata . . . manipura . . . swadhisthana . . .

and mooladhara.

This is the end of 1 round.

Spend a few seconds trying to visualize each centre.

Do a few more rounds according to time available. Then proceed to the next stage.

Stage 8: eyebrow centre awareness

Fix your attention at the eyebrow centre.

Feel your blood pulse at that point.

It is a rhythmical beat that goes on continuously. Be aware of it.

Synchronize the mantra Aum with the pulse beat.

The sound of the mantra is mental.

The pulse and Aum vibrate like the ticking of a clock.

Be aware of this process at the eyebrow centre.

Continue in this manner for a few minutes.

Then imagine that the Aum and pulse beat are expanding in all directions.

Your forehead is the centre from which Aum is emanating outwards in all directions.

Feel that your being and the whole universe is enveloped in Aum.

Everything is immersed in Aum.

Feel that your being is also expanding with the diffusion of Aum.

Imagine that the whole universe is enclosed in your own being.

Continue for a minute or so with this feeling! Then ask yourself: "Who am I? What is my real nature?"

Ask yourself with sincerity; you must really want to know the answer, but don't believe anything without firsthand experience.

Reflect on the question for a minute or so.

Then proceed to stage 9.

Stage 9: sankalpa

Repeat your sankalpa over and over again for a minute.

Then end the practice.

Stage 10: end

Become aware of your breath . . . and your whole body.

Become aware of outer sense perceptions.

Feel that you are lying on the floor; feel the places of physical contact.

Hear outside sounds.

Slowly move your body.

Stretch your muscles.

This is the end of yoga nidra.

Notes

¹ Yoga nidra: Part 1 – Book III, Lesson 33, Topic 5; Part 2 – Book III, Lesson 34, Topic 4; Part 3 – Book III, Lesson 35, Topic 4

² Book II, Lesson 19, Topic 2

³ Book II, Lesson 20, Topic 3

⁴ Book II, Lesson 21, Topic 3

⁵ Book II, Lesson 22, Topic 2

⁶ Book II, Lesson 23, Topic 3

⁷ Book II, Lesson 24, Topic 2

⁸ Book III, Lesson 25, Topic 5

⁹ Book III, Lesson 26, Topic 1

Daily Practice Program

Any of the programs given in these 36 lessons can be adopted as the basis for your regular yoga practice. They are all complete in themselves. Those in the first 24 lessons are ideal for preparing your mind-body for kriya yoga practice.

Many of you will not have started kriya yoga practice yet. Don't be in a hurry. Wait until you feel that you are ready both mentally and physically. When you feel a strong inner compulsion, then commence kriya yoga. Also don't start if you lack the time or if circumstances are unsuitable. You must use your own discretion in this respect; perhaps it is better that you consult an experienced yoga teacher or an ashram. Meanwhile, try to find time to practise other forms of yoga including asanas, pranayama and meditative techniques.

When you decide to begin kriya yoga practice, don't try to do all twenty kriyas on the first day. Slowly build up the sequence as we have done over a period of 12 lessons. We suggest that you spend at least two weeks mastering each kriya. in turn. That is, first

of all spend two weeks mastering vipareeta karani mudra; then spend the next two weeks mastering chakra anusandhana, practising one after the other in the correct sequence. Gradually master the other kriyas in the same manner until you build up a sequence that suits the time that you have available. Both the learning and daily practice of the kriyas should be progressive and ordered.

Direct teacher to student tuition is preferred in yoga; this also applies to kriya yoga. A good teacher can remove faults in practice before they become ingrained habits; moreover, a good teacher can firmly implant the mechanics of the practices on the student's subconscious mind. Kriya practices will then become spontaneous and effortless. There will be less feeling of doership . . . instead the kriyas will happen through the practitioner. Then they will bring about miraculous results. The kriyas will become the philosopher's stone that will transmute base metal (your present state of awareness) into gold (spiritual awareness).

Practice

Minutes

Program 1: duration 3 hours – full kriya practice
Practise all 20 kriyas everyday in the sequence that we have given in Topic 2 of this lesson.

Program 2: shortened kriya practice
Practise as many of the above kriyas as available time will allow, doing them in the correct sequence.

Program 3: duration 1 hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	5
Shavasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Ardha Padma Paschimottanasana	4
Ardha Matsyendrasana	4
Sarvangasana	4
Halasana	4
Matsyasana	3
Chaturtha Pranayama	10
Yoga Nidra	20
	60

Program 4: duration ½ hour for general health

Surya Namaskara	4
Shavasana	2
Sarvangasana	3
Bhujangasana	3
Shashankasana	3
Ardha (or Poorna) Matsyendrasana	4
Chaturtha Pranayama	10
Chant Aum 3 times	1
	30

And finally, remember this motto: 'much practice brings progress'.

Hari Aum Tat Sat

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Swami Satyananda was born in Almora (Uttaranchal) in 1923. Drawn to spiritual life from an early age, he left home at the age of eighteen, and in 1943 surrendered himself to Swami Sivananda in Rishikesh who initiated him into Dashnami sannyasa in 1947. He served his guru for twelve years, perfecting every aspect of spiritual life. Thereafter, he travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent as a wandering ascetic.

Realizing the need of the times as scientific rendition of the ancient system of yoga, he founded the International Yoga Fellowship in 1956 and the Bihar School of Yoga in 1963. During the next twenty years, Swami Satyananda hoisted the flag of yoga in every corner of the world, consolidated BSY into a foremost institution of yoga, and authored over eighty major texts on yoga, tantra and spiritual life.

‘Satyananda Yoga’ became a tradition which combines classical knowledge with experiential understanding and a modern outlook. In 1984 he founded the Yoga Research Foundation to synchronize scientific research and yoga, and Sivananda Math to assist the underprivileged. In 1988, at the peak of his achievements, he renounced everything and adopted kshetra sannyasa, living as a paramahansa ascetic. In 1989 Rikhia was revealed to him, where he came to live and performed higher vedic sadhanas in seclusion. Receiving the command to provide for his neighbours in 1991, he allowed the ashram to help the underprivileged villages in the region. From 1995 onwards, he performed a twelve-year Rajasooya Yajna with the sankalpa of peace, plenty and prosperity for all, and in 2007 he announced the establishment of Rikhiapeeth with its mandate to ‘serve, love, give’.

Swami Satyananda attained mahasamadhi, a yogic accomplishment of discarding the body at will to become one with the universal consciousness, in 2009, in the presence of his disciples.



Notes

Notes



SATYANANDA YOGA
BIHAR YOGA

Yoga and Kriya is the most comprehensive text ever published on yoga. It contains a complete course of thirty-six structured lessons on all the practices of integral yoga. The lessons were compiled from the teachings given by Swami Satyananda Saraswati and are useful as a practical and theoretical guide for all levels of yoga teachers and aspirants.

Yoga and Kriya presents a synthesis of yoga in a scientific and systematic manner. The different branches of hatha yoga, raja yoga, mantra yoga, karma yoga, bhakti yoga, jnana yoga and kriya yoga are progressively introduced with special emphasis on practice, theory and application in daily life.

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